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## THEOLOGICAL DEBATE WITHIN THE FAMILY





# The Founders Journal



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## Theological Debate Within the Family

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# The Founders Journal



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# Theological Debate Within the Family

*Tom Ascol*

The debate over Calvinism and Arminianism has been ongoing for four hundred years. The theological issues involved in the debate, of course, extend back much further. Those who take God's Word seriously have sometimes come down far apart in their understanding of the nature of God's sovereignty and grace and, more specifically, His sovereignty in grace.

There was a great theological consensus on this issue at the founding of the Southern Baptist Convention. The Second London Baptist Confession of Faith, published in 1689, was the most influential confession among Baptists in America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (often distributed in the forms used by the Philadelphia or Charleston Baptist Associations).

This confession is thoroughly Calvinistic and was particularly influential among Baptists in the southern United States. As Timothy George has noted, "Each of the 293 'delegates,' as they were then called, who gathered in Augusta to organize the Southern Baptist Convention [SBC] in 1845, belonged to congregations and associations which had adopted the *Philadelphia/Charleston Confession of Faith* as their own."<sup>1</sup>

That doctrinal consensus within the SBC broke down over the next seventy-five years, opening the door to widespread pragmatism and creeping liberalism by the middle of the twentieth century. The conservative resurgence, as it has come to be called, dominated SBC life in the last two decades of that century. With the dawning of the twenty-first century, Southern Baptists were once again firmly confessing confidence in the full authority and inerrancy of the Holy Scriptures.

Within that resurgent inerrancy movement, there was a growing, often undetected resurgence of confessional Calvinism. By the early years of the twenty-first century the return to the SBC's confessional heritage had become so widespread that it became the subject of newspaper, magazine and journal articles. It also became the target of many Arminian-leaning SBC leaders. With the emergence of the blogosphere, Southern Baptist advocates of confessional Calvinism, many of whom were in the younger, rising generation, began to push back against their attackers.

The debates that were sparked by this new form of communication often were characterized by unguarded and even acrimonious accusations. Extremists on both sides seemed intent on keeping the divide as deep and wide as possible, rarely giving each other the benefit of the doubt and often misrepresenting their theological disputants rather than honestly trying to understand them.

But in the middle of the last decade there also were efforts made by some Calvinists and non-Calvinists to reach out to each other in order to explore areas of agreement and common commitments. The resulting relationships that developed through those efforts began to create real hope that there could be genuine fellowship and cooperation among those who fall at different points along the Calvinism-Arminianism divide.

Where the gospel is rightly understood, affirmed, and given the preeminent place in faith and life, genuine, rich fellowship and meaningful cooperation can exist among God's people. The differences that we have are not ignored or dismissed as unimportant, but they are maintained with the kind of humility that becomes those whose Master humbled Himself to the point of death on a cross.

It was out of this developing atmosphere that the idea for the Building Bridges conference was birthed in February 2007. The goal was to bring together Southern Baptists of any and all theological persuasions to hear presentations by those who disagree on certain points of Calvinism/Arminianism. LifeWay Christian Resources hosted the meeting and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary and Founders Ministries sponsored it. The conference, marked by rigorous and respectful theological dialogue, demonstrated that Southern Baptist Calvinists and non-Calvinists can come together around the gospel without compromising doctrinal convictions.

The papers that were presented at the Building Bridges conference were compiled and published in a book, edited by Brad Waggoner and Ray Clendenen in 2008, called *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*. After the conference but before the book was released, Jerry Vines announced the "John 3:16 Conference" that would be held in November 2008. Steve Lemke, Provost of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, noted that the conference was "intended as a majoritarian Southern Baptist response to the 'Building Bridges' and 'Together for the Gospel' conferences."

The papers presented at the John 3:16 Conference (jointly sponsored by Jerry Vines Ministries, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Liberty Baptist Theological Seminary, Luther Rice Seminary and Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary) were also compiled (together with five additional chapters) and published in 2010 as *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, edited by Lemke and David Allen, dean of the School of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

That book has been widely acclaimed by Arminians of various stripes. Most recently, Roger Olson of Baylor University, has given it high praise and commends "Editors David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke and their collection of anti-Calvinist authors [for] boldly step[ing] where few have dared to step in recent years."

As a self-described "classical Arminian," Olson professes shock over Jerry Vines' statement that "none of the authors in this project is Arminian or a de-

fender of Arminianism.”<sup>2</sup> “I was stunned,” Olson says, “because I read much of the book before going back and reading Vines’ sermon that introduces it. In fact, . . . *all* of the authors are Arminians in the classical sense. I don’t know why Vines and they run from the label.” Love requires that we not simply label the contributors to *Whosoever Will* “Arminian” when they plainly reject that characterization. Historical accuracy and theological integrity, however, require that we identify many of their arguments and positions as nothing other than that.

This issue of the *Founders Journal* provides a selective review of and response to *Whosoever Will*. The purpose is to provide the kind of serious engagement that the book deserves. Anything less than a ruthlessly biblical response would dishonor the authors, all of whom are fellow-servants of our common Lord. In addition to the critiques that follow, Ken Keathley has written “An Appreciative Reply” to Tom Nettles’ extended critique of Keathley’s book, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach*, which was published in the last issue of the *Founders Journal* (FJ 81). Keathley is one of the contributors to *Whosoever Will* and the inclusion of his reply to Nettles demonstrates our desire for the kind of fraternal exchange that brothers ought to be able to have even when discussing disagreements over vitally important matters.

Matthew Barrett critiques the exegetical and theological arguments that are found in Steve Lemke’s chapter on irresistible grace while Ben Rogers exposes some of the historical inaccuracies in David Allen’s chapter on the atonement. Tom Nettles rounds out this issue by providing a brief, selective review of the whole book.

Truth matters. And the cause of truth will not be served by glossing over differences that we have in any areas with fellow-believers. Such differences ought to be explored with every position being forced to stand up under the intense scrutiny of Scripture. When this is done with respect for each other and devotion to God’s Word, such engagements can be tremendously profitable. That is the hope of this issue of the *Founders Journal*. ☺

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Timothy and Denise George, general editors, *Baptist Confessions, Covenants, and Catechisms* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1996), 11.

<sup>2</sup> David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, editors, *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 5.

# Is Irresistible Grace Unbiblical?

## *A Response to Steve Lemke's Arminian Objections*

*Matthew Barrett*

The debate between Calvinists and Arminians continues to rage among Southern Baptists today, as demonstrated in the publication of *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, a volume of essays from the recent John 3:16 conference. In particular, Steve Lemke's chapter, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace," is dedicated to refuting the Calvinists position of irresistible grace, the belief that God effectually calls and regenerates the sinner from death to new life.<sup>1</sup> As opposed to the gospel call to all people which can be resisted, the effectual call is intended only for those whom God has unconditionally elected. The Calvinists position, sometimes called monergism, concludes that effectual calling and regeneration logically and causally precede man's faith in conversion.<sup>2</sup> Monergism stands in direct tension with synergism, the view held by Arminians that God's saving grace can be resisted. While God provides a prevenient grace to all, such grace is not successful unless man exercises his free will to cooperate with it. Therefore, for the Arminian, God's act of regeneration is contingent upon man's free will to believe. Consequently, faith precedes regeneration in the *ordo salutis*. Lemke argues that Calvinists have no biblical warrant in affirming the doctrine of irresistible grace. To the contrary, Lemke seeks to argue for the Arminian position, namely, that God's grace is dependent upon the will of man for its success and efficacy.

Space does not permit me to respond to Lemke's entire chapter, the first half of which focuses on his biblical presentation and the latter half on his theological assessment. The latter half consists of seven theological and philosophical objections to irresistible grace and compatibilism.<sup>3</sup> Readers should consult the writings of theologians like Bruce Ware, John Frame, D. A. Carson, and John Feinberg who have extensively demonstrated the shortcomings of libertarian freedom (as well as Arminianism in general) and at the same time have ably defended a compatibilist framework.<sup>4</sup> It is my purpose here simply to focus on that which is at the very center of Lemke's argument, namely, Lemke's interpretation of key Scriptures which he believes eliminate the doctrine of irresistible grace and instead support the Arminian view that God's saving grace can be resisted unless the sinner cooperates with it by his own free will (synergism). It will be demonstrated in what follows that Lemke's exegesis is erroneous, as he fails both to interpret Scripture in light of its full context and to take into consideration *all* of Scripture. Conse-

quently, not only is Lemke's rejection of irresistible grace unbiblical but so is his affirmation of synergism, which makes the saving grace of God dependent upon man's free will, thereby exalting man's free will over God's sovereign prerogative.

## Problems with Lemke's Exegesis

### 1. Lemke fails to refute the scriptural distinction between the general gospel call to all and the special effectual call to the elect.

Lemke believes he has refuted the Reformed doctrine of irresistible grace by appealing to passages which say that sinners have resisted and rejected God. Lemke begins by appealing to Proverbs 1:22–26, Hosea 11:1–9, Psalm 78:10, Psalm 81:11–13, and Jeremiah 32:33 where Israel has turned her back on Yahweh, refusing to heed His call to repentance and life. Lemke then compares these verses to Acts 7:51 where Stephen rebukes the Jews for being stiff-necked, “always resisting the Holy Spirit” just as their fathers did. Lemke does admit that Calvinists do qualify their doctrine of irresistible grace by appealing to the outward, gospel call which goes out to all people and can be resisted and the inward, special or effectual call whereby God irresistibly draws the sinner to Himself. Unsatisfied, Lemke rejects such a distinction, arguing that it cannot make sense of the passages he lists because the “Jews, after all, were God's chosen people, and the entirety of the Jewish people were covered under the covenant, not just individual Jews .... But these divinely elected people have not only rejected Jesus as Messiah but resisted the Holy Spirit through many generations in history. Therefore, it would seem that God's grace is resistible, even among the elect who are eligible to receive the effectual call.”<sup>5</sup>

Moreover, Lemke also appeals to several passages in the life of Jesus. For example in Matthew 23:37 (cf. Luke 13:34) Jesus cries out that though He longed for Jerusalem, seeking to gather her children like a hen gathers her chicks, she was not willing. Lemke concludes that God's grace through Christ was resisted since man was unwilling. Indeed, if Jesus believed in an effectual, irresistible grace only for the elect then “His apparent lament over Jerusalem would have been just a disingenuous act, a cynical show because He knew that God had not and would not give these lost persons the necessary conditions for their salvation.”<sup>6</sup> Lemke argues the same in Luke 18:18 where the rich young ruler refuses to follow Jesus for eternal life. “Jesus would not grant him eternal life unless he was willing to make a total commitment of his life to God, but the young ruler was unwilling.”<sup>7</sup> And again, concerning Luke 13:24–28 where Jesus says it is harder for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven than a camel to enter the eye of a needle, Lemke states, “Of course, if Jesus were a Calvinist, He never would have suggested that it was harder for rich persons to be saved by God's irresistible grace than poor persons. Their wills would be changed immediately and invincibly upon hearing God's effectual call. It would be no harder for a rich person to be saved by God's



monergistic and irresistible calling than it would be for any other sinner. But the real Jesus was suggesting that their salvation was tied in some measure to their response and commitment to His calling.”<sup>8</sup> Likewise, in Matthew 21:28–32 Lemke argues that in the parable of the two sons the distinction between the two is not that one was a son and the other was not but rather that one son resisted and the other obeyed. The same is true in Jesus’ parable of the vineyard where wicked tenants continually reject the owner, even to the point of killing his own son (Matthew 21:33–44). Here is yet another example, says Lemke, where “the key differential was whether persons were willing to be responsive to the Word of God.”<sup>9</sup> Finally, Lemke appeals to the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:1–23), where seed falls on different soils with only one sprouting up to life. “Again, the variable is not the proclamation of the Word [seed] but the *response* of the individual.”<sup>10</sup>

There are several major problems with Lemke’s interpretation of these passages. First, Lemke fails to recognize the complexity of the term “elect” in the Old Testament. God elects Israel as His chosen people, but within Israel there are both those who are truly saved and those who are not.<sup>11</sup> Paul recognizes this in Romans 9:6 when he states that not all Israel is Israel. Therefore, it is essential to distinguish between historical election and eternal election. As John Frame observes, God can elect a nation in history but within this people God has eternally and salvifically elected only some to salvation while rejecting others.<sup>12</sup> Such a truth is evident in the New Testament as well. In his ministry, Christ elects twelve disciples. However, not all of these are eternally and salvifically elect as is apparent with Judas. The case of Judas is parallel to Saul in the Old Testament. While God has historically elected Israel and Saul as her king, not all within Israel, Saul included, are eternally and salvifically elect. Therefore, Israel is elected both for service and salvation but while all within Israel are historically elected for service, not all are eternally elected for salvation (cf. Romans 3:1–2; 9:4–5). While all of Israel has been circumcised not all have received the circumcision of the heart (Romans 2:29).

Lemke applies certain Old Testament passages as if all in Israel were salvifically and eternally elected, an assertion which contradicts Paul in Romans 9. With such an assumption, Lemke then concludes that since Israel rejects Yahweh grace can never be irresistible or effectual. Lemke simply ignores the biblical distinction between a historical election and an eternal, salvific election. With such a distinction in mind one can rightly interpret these OT passages as a gospel call to all of Israel to repent, though only some (the elect) will be effectually called to salvation.

Second, Lemke insists that all of the passages quoted above cannot be solved by the Reformed distinction between the gospel call and the effectual call and yet Lemke fails to address those passages that the Reformed believe support such a distinction. Is one simply to take Lemke’s word that such a distinction is unjustified when Lemke neglects to refute the distinction in the first place? To the contrary, several passages clearly support such a distinction. For example, in His

parable of the wedding feast Jesus compares two groups: those who were invited but did not come and those whom the King gathered (Matthew 22:1–14). Jesus concludes, “For many are called, but few are chosen” (22:14). It is clear in this passage that the first group received a general, gospel call or invitation that can be resisted and is for all people. However, the former group received a much different call. Indeed Luke’s account uses strong language to distinguish this second group’s calling from the first, for the master commands his servant saying, “Go out to the highways and hedges and *compel* people to come in, that my house may be filled” (Luke 14:23). Here the guests are compelled to enter into the master’s house, a calling very different from the invitation to the first group. Likewise, in Romans 8:30 the gospel call is distinguished from the effectual call. Paul states, “And those whom He predestined He also called, and those whom He called He also justified, and those whom He justified He also glorified” (Romans 8:30). If, as Lemke believes, there is only one call to all people then Paul’s argument is deeply problematic because it is not true that all those whom God calls He also justifies. However, Paul is here speaking of the effectual call, whereby those called will necessarily be justified and glorified.<sup>13</sup> Calling is not contingent upon man’s will in this passage. Again the effectual call is evident in 1 Corinthians 1:22–24, “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.” The gospel of Christ crucified is preached (gospel call to all) and Jews and Gentiles reject it. However, to those who are effectually called that same gospel is the power and wisdom of God which saves. As Welty states, “Clearly for Paul ‘the called’ are not those who merely hear the gospel but those who in fact embrace it. They are called *effectually*.”<sup>14</sup> Many other passages could be listed in support of the distinction between the gospel call and the effectual call (cf. Matthew 28:18–20; Acts 1:6–8; 26:16–23; Romans 10:8–15; 1 Corinthians 15:1–8; 2 Peter 1:10; Jude 1), but it is evident that such a distinction is inherently biblical, contrary to Lemke.

Moreover, it is important to note that since this distinction exists in Scripture, all of those passages used by Lemke and cited above simply support the gospel call to all people whereby God commands repentance and promises eternal life. Yes, in these passages sinners resist God, but such a resistance is a resistance of the outward gospel call, not of the inward, effectual call.

## 2. Lemke fails to consider how total depravity impacts commands in Scripture to believe.

Lemke spends pages citing a number of passages which he calls “All-Inclusive Invitations in Scripture” (Joel 2:32; Matthew 7:24; 10:32–33; 11:6, 28; 12:50; 16:24–25; John 1:7, 9; 3:15–16; 4:13–14; 6:40, 51; 7:17, 37; 8:51; 11:26; 12:46; Acts 2:21; 10:32, 43; Romans 9:33; 10:11, 13; 1 John 2:23; 4:15; 5:1; Revelation 3:20; 22:17).<sup>15</sup> According to Lemke, these passages (which he simply lists with

little commentary), disprove irresistible grace because in them God *commands* all people to repent and believe in Christ and *promises* that if they do they will inherit eternal life.<sup>16</sup> However, Lemke fails to consider how the pervasiveness of depravity impacts the sinner's ability to act upon these invitations in Scripture. In other words, man is dead in sin, a slave to sin, and therefore utterly unable to exercise anything of spiritual value towards Christ, faith included (cf. Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Ephesians 2:1–5; John 3:3, 5). Yes, God does offer salvation to those who believe and, yes, Christ does promise eternal life to those who trust in Him, but this in no way implies that man is able to accept Christ, for Scripture everywhere affirms that man is unwilling and unable to will that which is good due to his slavery and bondage to sin and the devil. Man's depravity is so pervasive that his will itself is in bondage to sin and utterly helpless until God, by an effectual act of sovereign grace, awakens that dead sinner to new life, so that he may repent and trust in Christ.

### 3. Lemke fails to distinguish between God's revealed will and decretive will in salvation.

Lemke cites numerous passages where God is said to desire the salvation of all people (Matthew 18:14; 23:37; 2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4). Lemke concludes from such passages that if God desires the salvation of all then it is preposterous to think that God would effectually call some while refusing to call others. Once again, Lemke disregards the biblical distinction between God's moral, revealed will, whereby He commands all to repent and believe, desiring the salvation of all people, and God's decretive will whereby He eternally and unconditionally decrees all things, including those who will and will not be saved (Genesis 50:20; Psalm 115:3; Isaiah 46:10; Daniel 4:34–35; Matthew 11:25–26; Acts 2:23; Romans 9:18; Ephesians 1:11). As John Piper and D. A. Carson have thoroughly shown such a distinction does justice to God's universal love whereby he desires that all be saved and God's particular, special, and saving love whereby he immutably and unconditionally decrees that only some be saved.<sup>17</sup> Regarding the latter, God states, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Romans 9:13; cf. Malachi 1:2–3).<sup>18</sup>

### The Biblical *Ordo Salutis* and Lemke's Failure to Discuss Certain Scriptures

In reading Lemke's chapter against irresistible grace, one is struck by Lemke's decision to ignore a host of Scriptures which undoubtedly support irresistible grace. It is obvious by now that on issues such as the gospel call and effectual call as well as the revealed will and decretive will Lemke fails to discuss passages that support such distinctions. Had he taken advantage of his opportunity to deal with these arguments, he could have strengthened his discussion greatly. We must not speculate as to why he omitted this discussion, but without dealing with pas-

sages such as John 3:3–8, 6:37, 44, 65, and 1 John 5:1, the reader should conclude that his case is far from adequate and even further from proved. Such passages, nevertheless, deserve a hearing. First, however, we must address those passages that Lemke believes support the Arminian view that faith precedes regeneration. Lemke cites three types of passages.<sup>19</sup>

(1) There are a number of passages which state that if a sinner believes he will receive “eternal life.” For example Jesus says to Nicodemus that “everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). And again in John 3:36 Jesus states, “He who believes in the Son has eternal life” and also in verse 40, “you are unwilling to come to Me, that you may have life.” Others passages say the same (cf. John 6:51, 53–54, 57; 11:25; 20:31). Lemke concludes from these passages that to receive “life” or “eternal life” is to be regenerated and since one must believe to receive eternal life (or regeneration), faith always precedes regeneration. However, equating “eternal life” with regeneration is a serious case of eisegesis on Lemke’s part. Lemke simply assumes that “eternal life” in these passages is synonymous with God’s instantaneous act whereby He awakens the dead sinner. However, this is not how Scripture defines eternal life. As Schreiner and Caneday demonstrate, the phrase “eternal life” is not only a present reality but an eschatological reality and “by definition is life of the age to come.”<sup>20</sup> In Scripture, eternal life is said not only to be received in the present (John 5:24; 6:47, 54; 1 John 5:11–13) but to be received in the future (cf. Mark 10:17, 29–30; Romans 2:6–7, 23; Galatians 6:8; 1 Timothy 6:19; Titus 1:2; 3:7; James 1:12; Revelation 2:10). In other words, unlike regeneration, which is a one time instantaneous act that occurs at the beginning of a sinner’s Christian life, eternal life, as Leon Morris has shown, is an eschatological hope that pervades into the present but ultimately is received in the life to come.<sup>21</sup>

The point is made clear when one examines other passages (which Lemke does not mention) that use the phrase eternal life to refer to a gift to be received in the age to come (Mark 10:17, 29–30; Romans 2:6–7, 23; Galatians 6:8; 1 Timothy 6:19; Titus 1:2; 3:7; James 1:12; Revelation 2:10). Notice how it sounds if we equate, as Lemke does, eternal life in these passages with regeneration. For example, Jesus, responding to the rich young ruler states, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers ... for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time ... and in the age to come *regeneration* (eternal life)” (Mark 10:29–30). Likewise, Paul states, “He will render to each one according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, He will give *regeneration* (eternal life)” (Romans 2:6–7). Notice, if Lemke is right in equating regeneration with eternal life then in Romans 2:6–7 one must do works to be regenerated. Surely Lemke does not want to affirm works-righteousness but his logic, if applied consistently, inevitably leads to this.

(2) Lemke also enlists a number of passages that make receiving the Holy Spirit contingent upon man's initial faith. For example, in Acts 2:38 Peter states, "Repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." And the apostle Paul states that "having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). Other passages also condition the reception of the Spirit on belief (cf. John 7:38–39; Galatians 3:13; 4:6). Like eternal life, Lemke equates the reception of the Spirit in these passages with regeneration so that belief must precede regeneration. However, like his understanding of eternal life, Lemke is reductionistic. Lemke gives no reason why one should equate the reception of the Spirit with regeneration. Why not interpret the reception of the Spirit as the *result* of regeneration? Or why should it refer to regeneration at all? Why not to conversion, adoption, justification, or union with Christ? Contrary to Lemke, these passages are best interpreted as meaning that one receives the Spirit at conversion. As James Hamilton has demonstrated at great length, regeneration and indwelling by the Spirit are not the same thing but are distinct events.<sup>22</sup> Since regeneration precedes conversion in the *ordo salutis*, these passages present no problem for irresistible grace.

(3) Finally, Lemke enlists a host of passages which say that if one believes he will be "saved" (Mark 16:15–16; John 1:12; John 20:31; Acts 13:39; 16:31; 18:8; Romans 1:16; 10:9–10; 1 Corinthians 1:21; Hebrews 11:6). However, just like the passages on "eternal life" so also with these Lemke erroneously equates "saved" with regeneration. Again, why should we interpret saved in such a narrow manner? Why not interpret saved as referring to adoption or justification? Or why not interpret saved as man's escape from hell in the age to come? To interpret saved as synonymous with regeneration is seen to be fallacious when one looks at how other passages would then have to be interpreted. Consider Matthew 27:42, where Jesus is on the cross and His accusers say, "He regenerated (saved) others; he cannot regenerate (save) himself." Clearly, such an interpretation is unwarranted. And again, 1 Corinthians 3:15 would say, "If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be regenerated (saved), but only as through fire." According to Lemke's understanding, Paul would be teaching that one is actually regenerated on the last day! It is obvious that Lemke has succumbed to a reductionistic interpretation by equating saved with regeneration.

As stated earlier, Lemke does not address the major passages Calvinists believe justify monergism. Such an omission creates serious difficulty when one examines the passages Lemke ignores. For example, in John 1:12–13 Jesus states, "But to all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Conveniently, Lemke only quotes verse



12, concluding that it is man's belief which brings about the new birth.<sup>23</sup> Why does Lemke ignore verse 13? Verse 13 actually disproves the interpretation Lemke seeks to draw from verse 12. In other words, it is not of man's will but of God that the sinner is born of God and consequently believes in Christ.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, John says that they "were born" of God. The verb "were born" is an aorist, passive, indicative, indicating action done in the past. The implication is clear: sinners have the right to become a child of God because they have been born again. As Ware states, "That is, what accounts for them having the right to be God's children, and what accounts for their believing in Christ's name, is that they had been born of God."<sup>25</sup> Therefore, John makes it clear that the new birth is not conditioned upon man's will, but is completely and only the act of God.

A second passage Lemke never even mentions is John 3:1–8 where Jesus states, that "unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God." Unless God first regenerates the sinner he cannot see God's kingdom in a saving way. Moreover, the analogy of birth itself precludes all forms of synergism. In birth the child plays absolutely no role whatsoever but is purely passive. Likewise, the sinner is dead in sin and is unable in any way to exercise any faith prior to the new birth. As Edwin Palmer keenly observes,

In birth a baby is completely helpless. He does not make himself. He is made. He is born. There is complete passivity on his part. Obviously a baby could not have said to his parents before he was born, "I determine that I shall now be born." And so it is in the case of a spiritual birth. That which is not yet born cannot say, "I will to be born." That which is dead spiritually cannot say, "I will to live." And that which has not yet been created can never say, "I will to be created." These are manifest impossibilities. Rather, as in the case of a baby, or creation yet to be, or a dead man, spiritual birth, creation, or life comes wholly at the discretion of the Holy Spirit. It is he who does the deciding, and not man. Man is entirely passive. The Holy Spirit is entirely sovereign, regenerating exactly whom he wills. Consequently, John could say that the children of God are "born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God" (John 1:13).<sup>26</sup>

The sovereignty of God is again emphasized in the new birth when Jesus compares the sovereign freedom of the Spirit to that of the wind which "blows where it wishes" (3:8). The Spirit is not controlled by the human will but works as God pleases to bring about new life. As Thomas Schreiner rightly says, the Spirit's role in the new birth is sovereign because, like the wind, it works apart from human control (John 3:8). "The Spirit grants new life sovereignly and unexpectedly, producing new life where humans least expect it to occur. New life comes not from human effort or human accomplishment but from the miraculous work of God's Spirit."<sup>27</sup> Sinclair Ferguson states,

The New Testament's statements on regeneration emphasize the sovereign, monergistic, activity *of the Spirit*. The metaphor of birth itself implies not only a radical new beginning, but one which is never autonomous. The divine monergism behind it is spelled out elsewhere in antitheses: we are born, not of our own will, but of God's decision (Jn. 1:12); from above, not from below; *of the Spirit*, not of the flesh (Jn. 3:3, 5–6); of God, not of man (1 Jn. 2:29; 3:9; 4:7; 5:1, 4, 18); by God's choice, not our own; through his word, not out of the energies of an autonomous will (Jas. 1:18). The priority here is accorded to God, not to man. The reason for this is that man is 'flesh'.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, to conclude that man in some way cooperates with God in regeneration (synergism) or that man's will in the act of faith is the cause of regeneration, so that conversion causally precedes regeneration, is an assault on the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit and furthermore denies the proper meaning of the biblical imageries used of the Spirit's work in regeneration.<sup>29</sup>

A third passage that Lemke ignores is John 6:44 where Jesus states, "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." Verse 35 demonstrates that coming to Christ is equivalent to believing. Therefore, in 6:44 no one can believe or exercise faith in Christ unless he is drawn by the Father. However, such a drawing is not for all people and cannot be resisted. Jesus states in 6:64 that "there are some of you who do not believe." John adds, "For Jesus knew from the beginning who those were who did not believe" (6:64). Jesus then concludes by repeating what he said in 6:44, "This is why I told you that no one can come to Me unless it is granted him by the Father." Ware correctly comments, "The only point that Jesus can sensibly be making by His statement in 6:65 is that those resistant to Him do not believe because they are not so drawn by the Father."<sup>30</sup>

A fourth passage Lemke cannot answer is 1 John 5:1 which states, "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him." Unlike the others, Lemke does actually cite 1 John 5:1 as a proof-text in his favor. However, 1 John 5:1 actually supports the Calvinist position that regeneration precedes faith. The verb "has been born" is in the perfect tense, meaning that it is an action completed in the past with continual results in the present. In 1 John 5:1 the continuing result is "believes," a present tense participle.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, it is the new birth which results in belief. The same grammatical construction is also true in 1 John 2:29, 3:9, 4:7, and 5:4. God's act of regeneration is what gives rise to the believer's faith.

In conclusion, there are many other passages Lemke neglects such as Acts 16:14 where the Lord opens Lydia's heart so that she believes and 2 Corinthians 4:6 where God shines His light into our dark hearts to give us a saving knowledge of the glory of Christ. It is evident that Lemke does not take into consideration major passages that support the biblical view that regeneration precedes faith.

## Lemke's Synergism Robs God of His Glory

John R. de Witt is correct when he states, "Arminianism essentially represents an attack upon the majesty of God, and puts in place of it the exaltation of man."<sup>32</sup> Therefore, though Lemke refuses to admit it, he cannot say with Paul, "it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy" (Romans 9:16). This is apparent when Lemke states, "So at the end of the day, [man's] response to the grace of God determines whether the call is effectual."<sup>33</sup> According to Lemke, and in direct contradiction to Paul, it does depend on human will, for unless man cooperates God's grace fails to save. Indeed, Lemke's view is the exact opposite of Paul's for Lemke must ultimately say "it depends not on God's mercy, but on human will or exertion." Though unintentional on his part, Lemke has set aside the majesty of God and, as John Owen stated, substituted an exaltation of the idol of free will.<sup>34</sup> ☹

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### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> Steve W. Lemke, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace," in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 109–162. Please note that Lemke's objections at times are almost identical to those of Kenneth Keathley. However, this article will focus strictly on Lemke though much of my criticisms can be applied to Keathley as well. See Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2010), 101–36.

<sup>2</sup> This order is a *logical* order not a *temporal* order. Lemke fails to understand this when he criticizes the Reformed *ordo* because a person could be regenerated on Wednesday but not have faith in Christ until Sunday. Lemke, "Critique of Irresistible Grace," 139–40. For several excellent defenses of monergism, to which this article is indebted, see the following: John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1955), 88–105; Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 68–112; Edwin H. Palmer, *The Person and Ministry of the Holy Spirit: The Traditional Calvinistic Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1974), 77–86; Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 708–721; Bruce A. Ware, "Effectual Calling and Grace," in *Still Sovereign*, eds. Thomas R. Schreiner and Bruce A. Ware (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2000), 203–228; Robert A. Peterson and Michael D. Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 20–41, 92–191; Greg Welty, "Election and Calling: A Biblical Theological Study," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, eds. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2008), 195–215. For an evangelistic application of this doctrine see C. H. Spurgeon, "The Spirit's Work in the New Creation," *Spurgeon's Expository Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977) 9:117–127.

<sup>3</sup> Lemke lists what in his view amount to the seven deadly sins of Calvinism: (1) Irresistible Grace Can Lead to the Denial of the Necessity of Conversion, (2) Irresistible Grace Reverses the Biblical Order of Salvation, (3) Irresistible Grace Could Weaken the Significance of Preaching the Word of God, Evangelism, and Missions, (4) Irresistible Grace Creates Questions About the Character of God, Particularly Regarding the Problem of Evil, (5) Irresistible Grace Does Not Have an Adequate Account of Human Freedom, (6) Irresistible Grace Has an Inadequate View of Time and Eternity, (7) Irresistible Grace Does Not Maximize God's Sovereignty and Glory. "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace," 131–161.

<sup>4</sup> Bruce A. Ware, *God's Greater Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004); John Feinberg, *No One Like Him* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001), 501–798; D. A. Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1994); Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994); John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 21–159.

<sup>5</sup> Lemke, "A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace," 119.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 120.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> This distinction is recognized by Richard Land in his article in the same volume on "Congruent Election." *Whosoever Will*, 45–59.

<sup>12</sup> John Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 317–334.

<sup>13</sup> Welty rightly observes, "The repetition of the near demonstrative pronoun *toutous*, 'these,' indicates that the same group of people is the object of each divine activity in the series, so that whoever is the recipient of one blessing is thereby the recipient of the rest as well." Greg Welty, "Election and Calling," 236. Strangely enough Lemke never interacts with Welty's article. Obviously, he could not interact with every article written on this subject even in the last decade, but one that came from the "Building Bridges Conference" and, therefore, so immediately connected to the "John 3:16 Conference" would seem to be relevant to his purposes of engagement.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. Likewise Peter states, "Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fail" (2 Peter 1:10). Peter must be referring to the effectual call for why would he exhort these Christians to make sure that they heard the external gospel call? It is obvious that they have! Instead, Peter is using "calling" here to refer to the effectual call (notice the connection with "election"), so that his readers are urged to examine themselves to make sure they truly are a follower of Christ. The "calling" is ascertained by an examination of the increasingly evident presence of the graces and fruitfulness mentioned in verses 5–8, for this is the sure effect of such a calling as Peter points to in verses 3 and 4. Such a powerful operation of the Spirit in producing these spiritual, moral, and virtuous proper-

ties so unnatural to our innate sinful predispositions is a clear evidence, Peter claims, of effectual calling in time, and [*kai*] thus of an eternal disposition of love toward us in election.

<sup>15</sup> Lemke, “A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace,” 122–27.

<sup>16</sup> Something must be said concerning Lemke’s form of argumentation and proof-texting. Lemke simply lists for pages numerous passages with little commentary at all and then concludes that his case is proven (see pages 122–127, 136–139). Proof-texting in this manner gives systematic theology a bad name. It demonstrates a failure to actually handle the passage within its proper context. In Lemke’s case, such a failure is evident as he cites many passages out of context and consequently comes to an erroneous theological conclusion. While there is a place to simply list a number of passages that support one’s case, Lemke does it excessively and in the end never actually interacts with the text of Scripture. The result is not careful exegesis but eisegesis.

<sup>17</sup> John Piper, “Are There Two Wills in God?” in *Still Sovereign*, 107–131; D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine of the Love of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 45–64.

<sup>18</sup> Editor’s note: The book review by Tom Nettles in this issue of the *Founders Journal* (pages 34–44) takes a somewhat different approach in seeing how these two ideas are related to each other..

<sup>19</sup> Lemke, “A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace,” 136–140. Keathley also cites these three types of passages in support of faith preceding regeneration. Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 101–36.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner and Ardel B. Caneday, *The Race Set Before Us* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 65 (cf. 66–67).

<sup>21</sup> Commenting on John 3:15 Leon Morris defines John’s use of eternal life as follows, “The word rendered ‘eternal’ (always used in this Gospel of life) basically means ‘pertaining to an age’. The Jews divided time into the present age and the age to come, but the adjective referred to life in the coming age, not the present one. ‘Eternal life’ thus means ‘the life proper to the age to come’. It is an eschatological conception (cf. 6:40, 54).” Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1971), 227.

<sup>22</sup> James M. Hamilton, Jr., *God’s Indwelling Presence* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2006), 1–126.

<sup>23</sup> Some have sought to argue that the “right to become children of God” in verse 12 is regeneration and therefore it is man’s faith (belief in His name) that causes this reality. However, the “right to become children of God” is the language of adoption not regeneration. The sinner is adopted into God’s covenant family due to faith in God’s Son. D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 126.

<sup>24</sup> Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 96; Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology*, 708.

<sup>25</sup> Bruce A. Ware, “Divine Election to Salvation,” in *Perspectives on Election: Five Views*, ed. Chad Owen Brand (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2006), 20.



<sup>26</sup> Palmer, *Holy Spirit*, 82–83. Also see Murray, “Regeneration,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1977), 167–201; Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 123; Schreiner, *New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2008), 463; Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, BECNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 124–125; J. I. Packer, “Regeneration,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001), 925.

<sup>27</sup> Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 463. Also see Palmer, *Holy Spirit*, 82–83. Many other biblical analogies also demonstrate the sovereignty of the Spirit including: circumcising the heart (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 31:31–34); writing the law on the heart (Jeremiah 31:31–34); removing the heart of stone and replacing it with a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 11:19; 36:26; cf. Jeremiah 24:7); breathing new life into dead dry bones (Ezekiel 37); shining light out of darkness and the very act of creating itself (2 Corinthians 4:6 and 5:17); creating man anew (2 Corinthians 5:17); the resurrection of a spiritually dead corpse (Romans 6:4; Ephesians 2:1; 1 Peter 1:3); washing and renewing (Titus 3:4–7); etc. For a similar list see Frame, *The Doctrine of God*, 75.

<sup>28</sup> Emphasis added. Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, 119. Likewise, Berkhof states, “The only adequate view is that of the Church of all ages, that *the Holy Spirit* is the efficient cause of regeneration. This means that *the Holy Spirit* works directly on the heart of man and changes its spiritual condition. There is no co-operation of the sinner in this work whatsoever. It is *the work of the Holy Spirit* directly and exclusively, Ezek. 11:19; John 1:13; Acts 16:14; Rom. 9:16; Phil. 2:13. Regeneration, then, is to be conceived monergistically. God alone works, and the sinner has no part in it whatsoever.” Emphasis added. Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2003), 473.

<sup>29</sup> As John Murray states, “We are wholly dependent upon the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is the sole agent or author. Man is the subject of an action of which the Holy Spirit is the sole author. Not by synergism or co-operation do we enter into the kingdom of God.” Murray, “Regeneration,” 183–83.

<sup>30</sup> Ware, “Effectual Calling and Grace,” 219. Also see Welty, “Election and Calling,” 238–39; Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, 186.

<sup>31</sup> Peterson and Williams, *Why I Am Not An Arminian*, 188–89; Hoekema, *Saved by Grace*, 100.

<sup>32</sup> John R. de Witt, “The Arminian Conflict,” in *Puritan Papers*, vol. 5, ed. J. I. Packer (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2000), 23. Likewise see J. I. Packer, “Arminianism,” in *Puritan Papers*, 5:39.

<sup>33</sup> Lemke, “A Biblical and Theological Critique of Irresistible Grace,” 123.

<sup>34</sup> John Owen, *A Display of Arminianism*, vol. 10 of *The Works of John Owen* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 14.

# John Bunyan and the Extent of the Atonement

*Ben Rogers*

**I**n *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* David Allen, Dean of the School of Theology at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, argued that John Bunyan did not affirm the doctrine of limited atonement.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Allen is not the only scholar who, in recent years, has called into question Bunyan's commitment to this doctrine. David Wenkel argued in a recent article that in his early writings Bunyan demonstrated an "Amyraldian penchant for combining real particularism with hypothetical universalism."<sup>2</sup>

Was Bunyan a "high Calvinist"? Did he affirm the doctrine of limited atonement? Allen and Wenkel say no, but this article takes the opposite position. John Bunyan did in fact hold to the doctrine of limited atonement. Furthermore, Bunyan's writings demonstrate no "conversion" to this position late in life: Bunyan was committed to the doctrine of limited atonement throughout his ministerial and publishing career. This study begins with an examination of Bunyan's mature reflections on the extent of the atonement which demonstrate a clear and definite commitment to the doctrine of limited atonement. It concludes by answering various objections to Bunyan's lifelong "high Calvinism."

## Bunyan's Mature Thought on the Extent of the Atonement

John Bunyan believed that the Scriptures teach that God's intention in the atonement was the redemption of the elect and them alone, and that this was fully and effectually accomplished on the cross. This conviction regarding the intention and accomplishment of the atonement is evident throughout his writings, but it becomes most clearly and maturely articulated in his later works,<sup>3</sup> particularly as he reflects upon the active obedience of Christ, the high priesthood of Christ, and covenant theology.

Justification by faith alone is the heart of the gospel and the Christian life for John Bunyan. He defended it on numerous occasions from Ranter and Quaker errors, and this doctrine finds expression, in some form or fashion, in almost every tract or treatise he published. For Bunyan, Christ's vicarious obedience not only applied to His death, but His life as well. Christ not only bore the sins of the elect; He fulfilled the whole law in their stead as well.<sup>4</sup> Thus in his later works one

can find Bunyan's commitment to limited atonement clearly articulated in various descriptions of Christ's vicarious obedience or active obedience on behalf of the elect.

In *The Saints' Knowledge of Christ's Love* (1692) Bunyan speaks of the active and passive obedience of Christ as belonging to the elect and them alone. For "God's people," Bunyan writes, Christ's "whole life (as well as his death) was a life of merit and purchase, and desert."<sup>5</sup> In his exposition of the parable of *The Pharisee and the Publican* (1685), Bunyan states that Christ fulfilled the law for us:

And hence it is said, that Christ did what he did for us; He became the end of the law for righteousness for us; he suffered for us; he died for us; he laid down his life for us, and he gave himself for us. The righteousness then that Christ did fulfill, when he was in the world, was not for himself simply considered, nor for himself personally considered, for he had no need thereof; but it was for the elect, the members of his body... This righteousness then, even the whole of what Christ did in answer to the law, it was for his, and God hath put it upon them.<sup>6</sup>

The same emphasis can be found in *The Saints' Privilege and Profit* (1692). Here, in elaborating on the symbolism of the rainbow around the throne of grace in Revelation 4:1–3, Bunyan returns again to Christ's vicarious obedience on behalf of the elect:

The sum then is, that by the rainbow round about the throne of grace upon which God sitteth to hear and answer the petitions of his people, we are to understand the obediential righteousness of Jesus Christ, which in the days of his flesh he wrought out and accomplished for his people; by which God's justice is satisfied, and their persons justified, and they so made acceptable to him.<sup>7</sup>

For John Bunyan, Christ's whole obedience, both active and passive, was performed for the elect and the elect alone. Bunyan believed that God the Father intended that God the Son provide actual righteousness for fallen, yet elect, sinners. And Bunyan firmly believed that Christ perfectly did so in the days of his flesh.

In addition to the doctrine of Christ's active obedience, the high priesthood of Christ became a prominent theme in Bunyan's later writings. In the last year of his life (1688) Bunyan published *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate*. In this treatise, the author demonstrates how the work of Christ as High Priest is related to the extent of the atonement. Under what is traditionally labeled the office of Christ the High Priest, Bunyan distinguishes three offices: the Office of the Sacrifice, the Office of the Priest, and the Office of the Advocate. Though these are three separate and distinct offices, there is harmony between them.<sup>8</sup> As a sacrifice, the sins of the elect are laid upon Christ.<sup>9</sup> As a priest, Christ has two duties: He must offer the sacrifice of Himself to the Father, and intercede for those for whom

He died.<sup>10</sup> And as an advocate, Christ stands up and pleads the merits of His blood for those saints that Satan accuses at the bar of God's justice.

In this treatise Bunyan makes it clear that not everyone has Christ for an advocate because Christ's advocacy is founded upon His sacrifice: the elect have Christ for an advocate because He died for them. At the bar, this advocate "pleads to a price paid, to a propitiation made; and this is a great advantage; yea, he pleads to a satisfaction made for all wrongs done, or to be done, by his elect."<sup>11</sup> The reprobate, however, has no such advantage. No such sacrifice stands on his behalf.<sup>12</sup>

In *Christ a Complete Saviour*, published four years after the author's death in 1692, Bunyan once again returns to the theme of the priestly work of Christ. This work is a treatise on the intercessory work of Christ and those who are privileged to it. Bunyan, like his friend John Owen, argues that Christ's sacrifice cannot be divorced from His intercession; the later is based on the former and completes it, thus Christ is a complete Savior. Complete salvation entails both the justification of the elect, which took place at the cross, and the preservation of the elect, which is accomplished by the intercession of Christ the High Priest. The whole argument of the treatise might be summed up as follows: Christ prays for the elect because He paid for the elect and them alone.

Some of the clearest statements Bunyan makes about the extent of the atonement can be found in his explanation of the interconnectedness of Christ's sacrifice and intercession in this work. In the opening pages of *Christ a Complete Saviour*, Bunyan specifically speaks of the elect as those for whom Christ prays and died. He writes:

He prays for all the elect, that they may be brought home to God...And the reason is, for that he hath paid a ransom for them. Christ, therefore, when he maketh intercession for the ungodly, and all the unconverted elect are such, doeth but petitionarily ask for his own, his purchased ones, those for whom he died before, that they might be saved by his blood."<sup>13</sup>

On the following page, Bunyan discusses Christ's interest in the elect; He has an interest in the elect, and thus He purchased them and prays for them.<sup>14</sup> Later on in the treatise, Bunyan suggests that not only does Christ pray for the elect based on His sacrifice on their behalf, but godly men do so as well. Bunyan writes: "He (the godly man) comes to God for the hastening the gathering in of his elect; for it is an affliction to him to think that so many of those for whom Christ died should be still in a posture of hostility against him."<sup>15</sup> Finally, Bunyan specifically mentions the "length and breadth" of His intercession and atonement. Bunyan defines Christ's intercession as:

Intercession, then, I mean Christ's intercession, is, that those for whom he died with full intention to save them, might be brought into the inheritance which he hath purchased for them. Now then, his intercession

must, as to length and breadth, reach no further than his merits, for he may not pray for those for whom he died not...

Bunyan continues:

But this, I say, his intercession is for those for whom he died with full intention to save them; wherefore it must be grounded upon the validity of his sufferings. And, indeed, his intercession is nothing else, that I know of, but a presenting of what he did in the world for us unto God, and pressing the value of it for our salvation.<sup>16</sup>

John Bunyan believed that it was the Father's intention that the Son, as Mediator, become a Sacrifice, High Priest, and Advocate for the elect and the elect alone. He could not conceive of Christ dying for one for whom he would not pray—"His intercession must, as to length and breadth, reach no further than his merits, for he may not pray for those for whom he died not." Bunyan's understanding of the sacrifice of Christ and Bunyan's understanding of the intercession and advocacy of Christ may not be divorced from one another.

Christ's active obedience and His priestly work are both grounded in Bunyan's covenant theology.<sup>17</sup> Like the aforementioned doctrines, the covenant of works and the covenant of grace were some of Bunyan's favorite theological topics. They, like the other two doctrines, receive significant treatment in all of Bunyan's writings, and like the other two doctrines, Bunyan's covenant theology, particularly as he treats it in his later writings, demonstrates a firm commitment to limited atonement.

Bunyan believed that all men were born under a covenant of works where blessings and life were promised for perfect obedience and curses and damnation were threatened for disobedience. Through the sin of Adam and Eve, their guilt and fallen nature were transmitted to their descendants; the covenant of works no longer offers blessings and life. However, God in His grace established a covenant of grace to redeem sinners. In this covenant of grace, God the Father made a contract or covenant with God the Son for the eternal salvation of a fixed group of fallen sinners called the elect, whom the Father had chosen to lavish His free grace and mercy upon. In this covenant of grace, the Son became surety for the elect and their representative head (federal head, public person), promising to come to earth, obey the law providing them with righteousness, suffer for their sins providing atonement for their sins, and thus reconcile them to God.

In *The Saints' Knowledge of Christ's Love* (1692), Bunyan emphasizes time and time again that all of Christ's redeeming activity is directed exclusively toward the elect and them alone. Bunyan writes, "Love in Christ pitcheth not itself upon undue or unlawful objects; nor refuseth to embrace what by the eternal covenant is made capable thereof."<sup>18</sup> He goes on to say that Christ's death as a public person (as a federal representative) was for the elect only. Bunyan writes:



Therefore, this death for us, was so virtuous, that in the space of three days and three nights, it reconciled to God in the body of his flesh as a common person, all, and every one of God's elect. Christ, when he addressed himself to die, presented himself to the justice of the law, as a *common* person; standing in the stead, place, and room of all that he undertook for.

Bunyan continues:

Then Christ in life and death is concluded by the Father to live and die as a common or public person, representing all in this life and death, for whom he undertook thus to live, and thus to die. So then, it must needs be, that what next befalls this common person, it befalls him with respect to them in whose room and place he stood and suffered.<sup>19</sup>

Christ has an interest in the elect because the Father made Him surety for them in the covenant of grace.<sup>20</sup> But Christ has no vested interest in those whom the Father left in their sins and passed over for salvation. He is not their Mediator, and thus He is not their Sacrifice, High Priest, Intercessor, or Advocate. Therefore Bunyan can say:

How many thousands are there for whom Christ doth not so much as once open his mouth, but leaves them to the accusations of Satan, and to Ahab's judgment, nay, a worse, because there is none to plead their cause? And why doth he not concern himself with them? Because he is not interested in them—"I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me, for they are thine and all mine are thine, and I am glorified in them."<sup>21</sup>

The mature expressions of Bunyan's covenant theology demonstrate a clear commitment to the doctrine of limited atonement. Bunyan appears to be almost totally unconcerned about what the death of Christ means for those who have been passed over for salvation. All of Christ's redeeming activity is directed to the elect and them alone. For their sakes, He becomes man, fulfills the demands of the law, suffers for their sins as a sacrifice, prays for them as an intercessor, and defends them as advocate.

Despite the clarity with which Bunyan articulates his understanding of the extent of the atonement in his later works, his commitment to limited atonement continues to remain a matter of debate. Those who see Bunyan as either a life-long four-point Calvinist or a convert to "high Calvinism" in later life usually appeal to his early, pre-imprisonment writings; his evangelistic appeals; to "all" or "world" texts; or to *Reprobation Asserted* to make their case. It is to these objections that we now turn.

## Bunyan and the Extent of the Atonement Prior to Imprisonment (1656 – 1660)

John Bunyan published four works before his imprisonment. His first published work is entitled *Some Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures* (1656). This work is both a polemic directed against the Christological errors of the Quakers and an evangelistic presentation of the gospel directed to the unconverted. In 1657, Bunyan published his second work, *A Vindication of Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, in response to Quaker objections to his first publication. In his third work, *A Few Sighs From Hell* (1658), Bunyan turns from Quaker polemics to the exposition of the parable of the rich man and Lazarus of Luke 16. And his fourth and final pre-imprisonment publication is *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded* (1660), which is the author's first major presentation of his covenant theology.

In each of these works there are a number of statements that seem to suggest that Bunyan did not hold to the doctrine of limited atonement. In *Some Gospel Truths Opened* Bunyan says that “he (Christ) was sent of God to die for the sins of the world.”<sup>22</sup> Again, in *A Vindication of Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, Bunyan writes, “And so in the nature of man he did become the Lamb of God, or the sacrifice of God, that doth take away the sins of the world.”<sup>23</sup> Bunyan makes a similar statement in *A Few Sighs From Hell*. He writes, “O Lord Jesus! What a load didst thou carry! What a burden didst thou bear of the sins of the world, and the wrath of God.”<sup>24</sup> And in *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded*, Bunyan makes a number of statements that seem to suggest that he held to a general view of the atonement. Bunyan explains that Christ took on the conditions of the covenant because “There should be a complete satisfaction given to God for the sins of the world; for that was one great thing that was agreed upon when the covenant was made.”<sup>25</sup> And again, Bunyan writes that Christ on the cross looked as if “the sin of the whole world was upon him” and that God reckoned Him to be “not only a sinner, but the very bulk of sin of the whole world, and condemned him so severely as if he had been nothing but sin.”<sup>26</sup>

Although these quotations seem to make a case for Bunyan's commitment to a general view of the atonement, a closer examination of these works reveals that such a conclusion are both unnecessary and unwarranted. First, although there are a few statements such as these in Bunyan's early writings, there are also numerous statements in those same works that suggest that Bunyan held to limited atonement. Take, for example, *Some Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*.<sup>27</sup> The author opens the work with a discussion about Christ as a Savior and explains Christ's saving work in covenantal terms: God foresaw the Fall of man, God fore-ordained some of those fallen sinners to salvation, and Christ will purchase redemption for them. Bunyan writes, “God seeing that we would transgress, and break his commandment, did before choose some of those that would fall, and give them to him that should afterward purchase them actually.”<sup>28</sup> Bunyan con-

tinues, “God having thus purposed in himself, that he would save some of them that by transgression had destroyed themselves, did with the everlasting Son of his love, make an agreement, or bargain, that upon such and such terms, he would give him a company of such poor souls as had by transgression fallen from their own innocence and uprightness, into those wicked inventions that they themselves had sought out.”<sup>29</sup> Bunyan also mentions the priesthood of Christ in his discussion of conditions of the covenant that Christ fulfilled for the elect. In this discussion Bunyan mentions that Christ prays for the elect and them alone, referring to them as the ones “which I covenanted with thee (the Father) for.”<sup>30</sup> Later on in the treatise, Bunyan specifically limits Christ death to the elect. He writes that Christ came to “redeem them that were under the law,” and then he clarifies his meaning saying, “that is, to redeem such as were ordained to life eternal, from the curse of the law.”<sup>31</sup> And again, Bunyan speaks of Christ bearing the sins of believers, not the sins of the whole race of mankind. Bunyan writes, “There was never any able to bear the sins of all believers in the world, that ever were, now are, or hereafter shall be, but the true God.”<sup>32</sup>

Secondly, the assertion that Bunyan rejected the doctrine of limited atonement as evidenced by his early writings rests almost exclusively on “all” and “world” texts. One should not, however, assume that when Bunyan speaks of “the world” and “all” he has in mind every member of the human race. As shall be demonstrated below, Bunyan can and does use those terms with reference to the elect alone.

Thirdly, Bunyan’s own experience of conversion prior to these writings and his writings immediately after show that “high Calvinism” was Bunyan’s default theological position. In *Grace Abounding*, Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography, the author recounts a severe trial that took place prior to his publishing career that could only afflict someone who was committed to the doctrine of limited atonement: he feared that he belonged to those for whom Christ did not die.<sup>33</sup> And shortly after his imprisonment, Bunyan published *A Map Showing the Order and Causes of Salvation and Damnation* (1673). This illustration of the outworking of the divine decrees depicts Supralapsarian “high Calvinism” and was based on similar illustrations made by William Perkins and Theodore Beza.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, given Bunyan’s “high Calvinism” both before and after the works in question, the numerous limiting statements found in all four works, and his nuanced interpretation of words such as “all” and “world,” one should not conclude that John Bunyan’s early thinking on the atonement is substantially different from his mature thought. The difference is one of clarity of thought and presentation, not substance.

## Bunyan’s Evangelistic Preaching

It is an indisputable fact that John Bunyan preached for conversion. In fact, it is not an overstatement to claim that it was the driving force of his preaching ministry. “I found my spirit leaned most,” wrote Bunyan in his autobiography, “after awakening and converting work...In my preaching I have really been in pain,

and have, as it were, travailed to bring forth children to God; neither could I be satisfied unless some fruits did appear in my work.”<sup>35</sup> This evangelistic impulse is also evident in his writings: almost every work that came from his pen includes one or more calls for sinners to come to Christ for salvation.

For some, this kind of evangelistic zeal is incompatible with “high Calvinism,” particularly the doctrine of limited atonement. It is argued that one cannot genuinely offer the gospel to all men because Christ did not die to purchase all men. Therefore, some have concluded that Bunyan’s evangelistic zeal is proof that he rejected the doctrine of limited atonement.

Take, for example, *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved; or Good News to the Vilest of Men* (1688). Bunyan says that he hopes this work will be “a heart-affecting discourse that tends to converts sinners.”<sup>36</sup> The gospel must be preached to all, Bunyan argues, beginning with the vilest of men, namely, Jerusalem sinners. At places in this work, Bunyan seems to suggest that Christ died for all men. In response to an objection from a Jerusalem sinner, Bunyan pleads with the unbeliever not to let the mocking of others keep him from eternal life:

Thy stubbornness affects, afflicts the heart of thy Saviour. Carest thou not for this? Of old, he beheld the city, and wept over it.’ Canst thou hear this, and not be concerned. Shall Christ weep to see thy soul going on to destruction, and will thou sport thyself in that way? Yea, shall Christ, that can be eternally happy without thee, be more afflicted at the thoughts of the loss of thy soul, than thyself, who art certainly eternally miserable if thou neglectest to come to him. Those things that keep thee and thy Saviour, on thy part, asunder, are but bubbles; the least prick of an affliction will let out, as to thee, what now thou thinkest is worth the venture of heaven to enjoy.<sup>37</sup>

Bunyan continues:

Hast thou not reason? Canst thou not so much as once soberly think of thy dying hour, or of whither thy sinful life will drive thee then? Hast thou no conscience? or having one, is it rocked so fast asleep by sin, or made so weary with an unsuccessful calling upon thee, that it is laid down, and cares for thee no more? Poor man! thy state is to be lamented. Hast no judgment? Art not able to conclude, that to be saved is better than to burn in hell? and that eternal life with God’s favour, is better than a temporal life in God’s displeasure? Hast no affection but what is brutish? what, none at all? No affection for the God that made thee? What! none for his loving Son that has showed his love, and died for thee? Is not heaven worth thy affection? O poor man! which is strongest, thinkest thou, God or thee? If thou art not able to overcome him, thou art a fool for standing out against him. ‘It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God.’ He will gripe hard; his fist is stronger than a

lion's paw; take heed of him, he will be angry if you despise his Son; and will you stand guilty in your trespasses, when he offereth you his grace and favour?<sup>38</sup>

On the surface, these statements seem to suggest a general view of the atonement, but this is not necessarily the case. First, it is not inconsistent with “high-Calvinism” to speak of Christ willing to save those who will eternally perish. This is especially true and indeed quite appropriate in presenting the gospel with an eye to conversions. What Bunyan is saying is that Christ is willing to save you, if you will be saved. Secondly, by saying to the sinner “Christ died for thee,” Bunyan could have in mind a number of different possibilities. He could be suggesting that Christ died for the sinner if the sinner comes. Or, it is possible, that the imaginary character Bunyan is appealing to in the work is, in his mind, an elect sinner whom he hopes to convert with this plea. It should be noted that just a few pages after this quote, Bunyan implies that the atonement is limited to the elect. Bunyan speaks of the wiles and stratagems of Satan that undoes the world of men. Despite all his best efforts, there remains among the race of men a remnant, “the seed of election,” that Satan does not deceive. On this remnant Satan, the lion, pours out all his wrath. Bunyan writes, “Oh! The rage and roaring of this lion, and the hatred that he manifests against the Lord Jesus, and against them that are purchased with his blood!”<sup>39</sup>

In short, Bunyan's evangelistic fervor in no way undermines his “high Calvinism” or his commitment to the doctrine of limited atonement. In fact, one should be surprised to find a preacher like Bunyan speaking about such mysteries of the faith in a work intended to be “a heart-affecting discourse that tends to convert sinners.” When addressing unbelievers, Bunyan directed his hearers not to the decree of election, but to Christ.

## Bunyan and Universal Texts

As was mentioned before, those who argue that Bunyan was a “moderate Calvinist” frequently appeal to texts where the author says that Christ died for “all men” or “the world.” If Bunyan understood these terms in the broadest possible sense, then Bunyan would indeed be a four-point Calvinist, as David Allen has argued,<sup>40</sup> if not an Amyraldian, as David Wenkel has argued, or an outright Arminian. Though Bunyan does at times speak of Christ dying for “all” or suffering for the sins of the “world,” in so doing he does not take those terms in their widest possible sense.

In *A Defense of the Doctrine of Justification By Faith in Jesus Christ* (1672) Bunyan speaks of Christ dying “for the sins of the world”<sup>41</sup> on a number of occasions. He also speaks of believers feeding upon the flesh and blood of Christ by faith that was “once given for the sin of the world.”<sup>42</sup> And again in *A Light for Them That Sit in Darkness* (1674) Bunyan says that the day Christ stood before the Father on

the cross “he was as the sin of the world.”<sup>43</sup> He goes on to say, “Look, then, upon Christ crucified to be as the sin of the world, as if he only had broken the law.”<sup>44</sup> Quoting John 1:29, Bunyan once again speaks of Christ as the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.<sup>45</sup> And later Bunyan speaks of Christ being charged with the sins of the whole world.<sup>46</sup>

Though Bunyan sometimes speaks of Christ as dying for the sins of the world, it should be noted, that Bunyan does not always have in mind the entire race of men when he uses the word “world.” In *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate* (1688) Bunyan uses “world” in reference to the totality of the elect: past, present, and future. Bunyan writes, “He is our Advocate, and also our priest. As an Advocate, ours only; but as a propitiation, not ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world; to be sure, for the elect throughout the world.”<sup>47</sup> Bunyan then immediately speaks of Christ offering “a propitiatory sacrifice for all,” but, as before, he qualifies “all” as he did “world” by referring to “all that shall be saved” and he goes on to argue that “by any man, must not be meant any of the world.”<sup>48</sup>

Again, in *A Light for Them That Sit in Darkness*, Bunyan clarifies his definition of the “world” on page 1:409. Bunyan clarifies who he has in mind with his use of “world” in the following sentence: “Look, then, upon Christ crucified to be as the sin of the world, as if he only had broken the law; which done, behold him perfectly innocent in himself, and so conclude that for the transgression of God’s people he was stricken; that when the Lord made him to be sin, he made him to be sin for us.”<sup>49</sup> Bunyan speaks of the “sins of the world,” but goes on to clarify his meaning: the “sins of the world” are actually “the transgression of God’s people.”<sup>50</sup>

One should also take notice of Bunyan’s extended discussion about the proper way to exegete universal texts in *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ* (1680). Bunyan’s general principle is that a word “must be limited and enlarged, as the truth and argument, for the sake of which it is used, will bear; else we shall abuse Scripture, and readers, and ourselves, and all.”<sup>51</sup> For example, in explaining the “all” of John 7:32 (And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto me), the author states, “he must mean by all men, those, and only those, that shall in truth be eternally saved from the wrath to come.”<sup>52</sup>

When Bunyan employs “all” and “the world” language, one must not assume he is using such terms in the widest possible sense, and thus those texts that speak of Christ dying for “all men” or bearing the sins of “the world” do not necessarily suggest that Bunyan believed that it was God’s intention that Christ suffer for the sins of every human being.

## Reprobation Asserted

Probably the most often cited document that is used to refute Bunyan’s “high Calvinism” is *Reprobation Asserted* (1674).<sup>53</sup> In chapter IX, the author answers the question of “Whether God would indeed and in truth, that the gospel, with the grace thereof, should be tendered to those that yet he hath bound up under Eter-

nal Reprobation?"<sup>54</sup> He answers in the affirmative saying: "In the language of our Lord, 'Go preach the gospel unto every creature'; and again, 'Look unto me, and be ye saved; all ye ends of the earth'. 'And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely'. And the reason is, because Christ died for all, 'tasted death for every man'; is 'the Saviour of the world', and the propitiation for the sins of the whole world."<sup>55</sup> The author continues:

Second, I gather it from those several censures that even every one goeth under, that doth not receive Christ, when offered in the general tenders of the gospel; 'He that believeth not,— shall be damned'; 'He that believeth not God hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of his son'; and, Woe unto thee Capernaum, 'Woe unto thee Chorazin! woe unto thee Bethsaida!' with many other sayings, all which words, with many other of the same nature, carry in them a very great argument to this very purpose; for if those that perish in the days of the gospel, shall have, at least, their damnation heightened, because they have neglected and refused to receive the gospel, it must needs be that the gospel was with all faithfulness to be tendered unto them; the which it could not be, unless the death of Christ did extend itself unto them; for the offer of the gospel cannot, with God's allowance, be offered any further than the death of Jesus Christ doth go; because if that be taken away, there is indeed no gospel, nor grace to be extended. Besides, if by every creature, and the like, should be meant only the elect, then are all the persuasions of the gospel to no effect at all; for still the unconverted, who are here condemned for refusing of it, they return it as fast again: I do not know I am elect, and therefore dare not come to Jesus Christ; for if the death of Jesus Christ, and so the general tender of the gospel, concern the elect alone; I, not knowing myself to be one of that number, am at a mighty plunge; nor know I whether is the greater sin, to believe, or to despair: for I say again, if Christ died only for the elect, &c. then, I not knowing myself to be one of that number, dare not believe the gospel, that holds forth his blood to save me; nay, I think with safety may not, until I first do know I am elect of God, and appointed thereunto.<sup>56</sup>

The later quote is probably the most definite statement on a general view of the atonement that can be found in Bunyan's collected works. However, there are two problems with using *Reprobation Asserted* to disprove Bunyan's commitment to the doctrine of limited atonement. The first problem is one of interpretation. Paul Helm denies that Bunyan actually taught a general view of the atonement in *Reprobation Asserted*. Christ's death, Helm argues, "extends itself to the reprobate in the sense that if they were to believe then Christ's death would suffice for salvation."<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, Bunyan is dealing with the practical question of what the preacher should say: "the preacher is not to call the elect to Christ *as the elect*."<sup>58</sup> Finally, in insisting that the offer of the gospel is genuine the author is

not implying that the reprobate will ever come to Christ. Helm notes that Bunyan makes the distinction between God being willing to save the reprobate and being resolved to do so.”<sup>59</sup>

The second, and more significant problem, is authorship. John Bunyan was probably not the author of *Reprobation Asserted*. The authenticity of the work has been a matter of dispute since John Brown, Bunyan’s chief biographer, argued that the book was pseudonymous.<sup>60</sup> Brown believes that Bunyan’s publisher, Charles Doe, mistakenly took the work to be Bunyan’s. During this time there were four other books passed off falsely in Bunyan’s name, “for the purpose of trading upon his popularity.”<sup>61</sup> Brown suggests other external evidences in support of his conclusion: this work is printed differently than the rest of Bunyan’s works, it has an unusual title page, and the work in question did not appear in any of the first three collected editions of Bunyan’s writings (1692, 1736, and 1774).<sup>62</sup> Brown also notes that the substance and style is not Bunyan’s. Brown states, “It neither begins nor ends in Bunyan’s characteristic fashion, nor is there in it a single touch to remind us of his own particular vein. Let him write on what subjects he may, he writes not long before he either melts with tenderness or glows with fire. This writer never deviates into anything of the kind. He is hard and cold in style, thin in scheme and substance, and he is what Bunyan never was—pitiless in logic, without being truly logical.”<sup>63</sup> Richard Greaves concurs, saying, “Stylistically *Reprobation Asserted* is manifestly different from Bunyan’s theological treatises and homiletic and expository works. Its logical and well-ordered structure, involving eleven chapters in forty-four pages, is essentially without parallel in Bunyan’s (other) writings. The customary ‘use’ or ‘application’ with which he concludes most of his works is also absent.”<sup>64</sup> Greaves believes the work to be the production of an open-membership, open-communion Particular Baptist who admired Bunyan’s role in that debate.

In conclusion, *Reprobation Asserted* cannot be viewed as proof that John Bunyan held to a general view of the atonement. Not only are there varying interpretation of chapter IX, but, more significantly, John Bunyan is probably not the author of the work in question.

## Conclusion

In *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* David Allen wrongly characterized John Bunyan as a “moderate” or four-point Calvinist. The mature Bunyan spoke clearly and definitively about the extent of the atonement: it was the intention of the Father and the Son that Christ die for the elect and the elect alone, and this is precisely what was accomplished on the cross. Such a position is evidenced by his mature articulation of the active obedience of Christ, the High Priesthood of Christ, and his covenant theology. There is a precision in his later writings that is absent from some of his earlier publications, yet nowhere in his writings does Bunyan substantially drift from the “high



Calvinism” of his mature thinking. Bunyan was converted in the context of “high Calvinism” as evidenced by the nature of some of his temptations, and his early writings should be viewed in that light. Though Bunyan passionately pleaded with the lost to come to Christ, his evangelistic zeal should not be seen as incompatible with “high Calvinism.” Bunyan did in fact speak of Christ dying for “all” and suffering for the sins of the “world,” yet Bunyan himself warns against taking these terms in their widest possible senses. And though *Reprobation Asserted* bears his name, there remains considerable doubt amongst Bunyan scholars about both the authenticity of the work and its interpretation, and thus it should not be made to serve as *prima facie* evidence that Bunyan was a “moderate Calvinist.”

It should be noted that Bunyan never devoted a single work to the question of the extent of the atonement, nor did he engage in polemics to defend it as he did with the doctrine of justification by faith alone. It is better to read Bunyan as a pastor than as a systematician. In the appropriate pastoral context, one can find Bunyan speaking candidly about the extent of the atonement, the doctrine of election and predestination, and other mysteries of the faith. But when Bunyan was appealing to those under the covenant of works, he had other aims. It is best to view Bunyan as one for whom limited atonement was assumed and thus it emerged naturally when he spoke about related theological topics such as justification by faith alone, the priesthood of Christ, and covenant theology.☹️

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## Notes:

<sup>1</sup> David L. Allen, “The Atonement: Limited or Universal?” in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, eds. David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010), 67.

<sup>2</sup> David Wenkel, “John Bunyan’s Soteriology During his Pre-Prison Period (1656–1659): Amyraldian or High-Calvinist?” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005): 333.

<sup>3</sup> The later works cited in this section are undisputed. Of the five here cited, only the title of one of the works (*The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate*) was altered. The substance remained unchanged. The reader, therefore, can have a high degree of confidence that Bunyan’s later works cited in this section are truly his words.

<sup>4</sup> Pieter de Vries, *John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation*, trans. C. Van Haaften (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 148.

<sup>5</sup> John Bunyan, *The Saints’ Knowledge of Christ’s Love*, in *The Works of John Bunyan*, ed. George Offor, vol. 2 (Glasgow: W.G. Blackie and Son, 1854: reprint, Edinburgh and Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 19.

<sup>6</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pharisee and the Publican*, in *Works*, 2:247.

<sup>7</sup> John Bunyan, *The Saints’ Privilege and Profit*, in *Works*, 1:648.

<sup>8</sup> John Bunyan, *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate*, in *Works*, 1:161.

- <sup>9</sup> John Bunyan, *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate*, in *Works* 1:161, 163, 201.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:169.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:176. See also 161.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 164
- <sup>13</sup> John Bunyan, *Christ a Complete Saviour*, in *Works*, 1:203.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:204.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:226.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:235.
- <sup>17</sup> For a good analysis of Bunyan's Covenant Theology see Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan* (Grand Rapids, MI: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969), 97–122.
- <sup>18</sup> John Bunyan, *The Saints' Knowledge of Christ's Love*, in *Works*, 2:16.
- <sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:20.
- <sup>20</sup> John Bunyan, *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate*, in *Works*, 1:164.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> John Bunyan, *Some Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, in *Works*, 2:166–67.
- <sup>23</sup> John Bunyan, *A Vindication of Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, in *Works*, 2:208.
- <sup>24</sup> John Bunyan, *A Few Sighs From Hell, or The Groans of a Damned Soul*, in *Works*, 3:706.
- <sup>25</sup> John Bunyan, *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded*, in *Works*, 1:526.
- <sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:561.
- <sup>27</sup> For limited atonement references in *A Vindication of Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures* see in *Works* 2:177, 179, 180, 185, 207. For similar references in *A Few Sighs From Hell* see 3:674, 680, 681, 684, 692, 700, 704, 706, 709, 717, 724. For similar references in *The Doctrine of Law and Grace Unfolded* see 1:506, 507, 522, 523, 524, 532, 534, 535, 551.
- <sup>28</sup> John Bunyan, *Some Gospel Truths Opened According to the Scriptures*, in *Works*, 2:141.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:141–42.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:142.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:147.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:150.
- <sup>33</sup> See John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works* 1:29.
- <sup>34</sup> Richard Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 173–74.
- <sup>35</sup> John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, in *Works* 1:43.
- <sup>36</sup> John Bunyan, *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved; or Good News to the Vilest of Men*, in *Works*, 1:68.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 1:90.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> John Bunyan, *The Jerusalem Sinner Saved; or Good News to the Vilest of Men*, in *Works*, 1:96.

<sup>40</sup> David Wenkel, "John Bunyan's Soteriology During his Pre-Prison Period (1656–1659): Amyraldian or High-Calvinist?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58 (2005).

<sup>41</sup> John Bunyan, *A Defense of the Doctrine of Justification By Faith in Jesus Christ*, in *Works*, 2:307. See also 2:329 and 2:330.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:309.

<sup>43</sup> John Bunyan, *A Light For Them that Sit in Darkness*, in *Works*, 2:408.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:409.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:416.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:432.

<sup>47</sup> John Bunyan, *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate*, in *Works*, 1:170.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:170.

<sup>49</sup> John Bunyan, *A Light For Them That Sit In Darkness*, in *Works*, 2:409.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:409.

<sup>51</sup> John Bunyan, *Come and Welcome to Jesus Christ*, in *Works*, 1:242.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> See Dr. Allen's article in *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism*, 75–76, 98.

<sup>54</sup> John Bunyan, *Reprobation Asserted*, in *Works*, 2:348.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:348.

<sup>57</sup> Paul Helm, "John Bunyan and Reprobation Asserted" *The Baptist Quarterly* 28 (2) (1979): 91.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan and English Nonconformity* (London: Hambleton Press, 1992), 185.

<sup>61</sup> John Brown, *John Bunyan: His Life, Times, and Work* (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1885), 245.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan and English Nonconformity*, 188.

# An Appreciative Reply to “*A Serious and Respectful Interaction* with Kenneth Keathley” by Tom J. Nettles

Kenneth D. Keathley

I thank Tom Nettles for his thorough review of *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* [in *Founder Journal* 81 (Summer 2010), 3–33]. He provides an excellent summary. Clearly he paid close attention to the details of the book’s arguments. Though the review is hard-hitting, it is judicious and fair. I also thank Tom Ascol for giving me the opportunity to give a brief response. The three of us met at the Building Bridges Conference at Ridgecrest in 2007, and I am glad to call both men my friends and brothers in Christ.

Both Dr. Nettles and I have signed the *Abstract of Principles*, the statement of faith which guides the Southern Baptist seminaries in which we teach (Southern and Southeastern, respectively). In its article on “Providence” the Abstract states, “God from eternity decrees or permits all things that come to pass and perpetually upholds, directs, and governs all creatures and all events; yet so as not in any wise to be author or approver of sin nor to destroy the free will and responsibility of intelligent creatures.” The view I argue in *Salvation and Sovereignty*, called Molinism, attempts to preserve the simultaneous truths presented in the Abstract’s article. Though God controls all things, He does not cause all things. He is not the author or efficient cause of sin.

Calvinism and Molinism have many points in agreement, which Nettles acknowledges at times in his essay. Both affirm unconditional election, both affirm the completely gracious nature of salvation, both affirm that God perfectly accomplishes His will with precision and success, and both affirm that the world we live in is the result of God’s free and sovereign choice. For the most part I have no disagreement with Nettles’ depiction of God’s sovereign grace and meticulous providence. Indeed, some of the strongest criticisms lodged against my position come from Arminians who consider me a “closet Calvinist.” And in *Salvation and Sovereignty* I made a point to show that my complaints with Calvinism were first expressed by self-professed Calvinists.

The main difference between the two systems is that Molinism allows for a level of human freedom most Calvinists reject. In addition, many modern Calvinists follow Jonathan Edwards in his affirmation that all things happen by necessity and that all things occur via causal determinism. Nettles gives a spirited defense of both tenets in his essay. In my book I argued against both to the best of my ability. Obviously he was not persuaded.

There are many things I could say in response, but let me highlight three brief points. First, Nettles gives the impression that I deny the concept of necessity al-

together. What I deny is Luther's contention that everything happens by necessity. Calvin distanced himself from Luther on this point, as did the post-Reformation theologians such as Gomarus and Turretin. In addition to necessity, they also affirmed that certain truths and events are contingent. They realized that the notion of contingency is essential for a proper view of God's freedom. God was under no compulsion to create or to elect. If God had chosen otherwise it would not have detracted from His excellencies or His glory.

Second, Nettles argues that determinism is an essential element of Calvinism. Actually, as Reformed historian Richard Muller points out, among pre-18th century Calvinists "there is not even a tendency toward metaphysical determinism" (*Salvation and Sovereignty*, 66). Causal determinism entered Reformed theology primarily through the work of Edwards. Nettles' definition of determinism lacks clarity. He seems to equate "determining" with "determinism." This does not allow for the significant distinction that is made regularly in this conversation. "To determine" means primarily to decide or ordain. On this Molinists and Calvinists agree: God's determinative will is the decisive factor as to what happens in the world. "Determinism" is another matter. Determinism contends that our choices are events caused by prior factors so that no other choices are truly possible. The problems with causal determinism are obvious—it appears to make God the origin of evil and the author of sin. This is a conclusion Nettles rejects as strongly as I do, but I argue he cannot do so consistently. Many Reformed theologians (such as Timothy George) also recognize that causal determinism undermines human agency, freedom, and responsibility.

Third, both Dr. Nettles and I hold to an infralapsarian understanding of God's decrees. However, as do a host of Reformed theologians, I recognize the problems inherent with the typical Calvinist presentation. Molinism is simply consistent infralapsarianism. It is better able to affirm that God has an asymmetric relationship with the elect and the reprobate, i.e., He ordains the redemption of the elect but allows the damnation of the reprobate. Molinism can affirm permission in a way that does justice to the concept. It avoids the tendency to see election as an anthropocentric decision in which the redemption of certain individuals is the primary focus of the divine decree. Instead Molinism incorporates individual election into God's decree to create a world that will glorify Him by demonstrating the glory of His grace (Ephesians 1:3-14). Molinism accounts well for how human history is incorporated into the divine decree in a way that does not impinge on divine sovereignty.

The constraints of the space allotted to me keep me from giving a more thorough reply. Tom Nettles continues to be a hero to me. His book, *Baptists and the Bible* (1980), which he co-authored with my predecessor, L. Russ Bush, was a life-line to me in the early days of my theological formation. We have our differences, as my book and his review demonstrate. But he continues to have my appreciation and affection. ☺

# Book Review

Tom J. Nettles

David L. Allen and Steve W. Lemke, editors, *Whosoever Will: A Biblical-Theological Critique of Five-Point Calvinism* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2010. 206 pages, including Name Index, Subject Index and Scripture index. \$24.99 pb.

When Roger Olson read *Whosoever Will*, he was baffled and pleased. His bafflement must surely embarrass the writers. He calls them “anti-Calvinist authors,” to which the editor inserts a caveat, “The authors of *Whosoever Will* would not describe themselves as ‘Anti-Calvinists,’” while Olson is perplexed at their unwillingness to denominate themselves “Arminians” and states unequivocally that “*all* of the authors are Arminians in the classical sense.” Of course Olson is not complaining but celebrating his new-found doctrinal compatriots and in fact anoints it as “*the* scholarly argument against Calvinism by evangelical authors.”

I have tried to find a way to confirm Olson’s judgment (he might be right that this is the best argument that can be mounted against Calvinism) but have not seen things as clearly as he did. Jerry Vines’ sermon on John 3:16 has many fine moments exegetically, theologically, and rhetorically. He would improve his overall credibility if he incorporated into his discussion of love for each and every individual in the world texts that assert that “God shall have them in derision” (Psalm 2:4), and God “hates all workers of iniquity” (Psalm 5:5),” and the “Lord will abhor the bloody and deceitful man” (Psalm 5:6), and the nature of God’s love for Jacob while He declares, “I hated Esau” (Malachi 1:3; Romans 9:13). His litany of the uses of the Greek word *pas* would pass a severer test if he included in it such uses as “*All* those given to Me by the Father will come to Me,” (John 6:37) and “You have given Him authority over all flesh, in order that to *all* the ones You have given Him He may give eternal life” (John 17:2). Some might also like him to unpack his view of the attributes of God upon which he justifies the interrogative, “What kind of God would not make salvation possible for all?” (24).

Paige Patterson, who expresses appreciation for the conscientious attention to the biblical text given by Calvinists, does an excellent job of affirming human sinfulness including a display of strategically selected Scripture passages. While he accepts Adam’s natural headship and the consequent corruption of humanity, he

rejects federal, or covenant headship as a negative reflection on the justice of God and a poor background for the virgin birth (37). If this were “*the* scholarly argument” one might expect Patterson to acknowledge that those who believe in federal headship normally also accept the natural connection between Adam and his posterity as the source of spiritual corruption. They see it as subordinate to federal headship for they defend the justice of God in permitting the flow of corruption by seeing it as a punitive measure for our sin in Adam. One would also expect an explanation as to how imputation of righteousness through union with Christ, our covenant head for righteousness, is consistent with a pure natural headship in our relation with Adam. One would not expect a long Spurgeon quote illustrating the assertion “Calvinist C. H. Spurgeon saw as unscriptural the idea that regeneration preceded faith” (35) when the quote in reality assumes Spurgeon’s agreement with the idea that regeneration precedes faith but sees it as no bar to the unhindered call to faith in Christ for all. Historically it fits with his conflict with the hyper-Calvinists of London. It is certainly appropriate, and consistent with Olson’s hope, that Patterson quotes an outstanding Arminian, Free-will Baptist Robert Picirilli, in defense of a synergistic understanding of the relation between the human will and affections under the enabling but resistible operations of the Holy Spirit in bringing a “dead” sinner to faith in Christ (43f). If the dead can do something spiritually for their own benefit, a stronger defense than anecdotes is needed for its demonstration (40–43).

Richard Land’s discussion of election to which he gives the moniker “congruent election,” struggles to reach the high accolade granted by Olson, but Olson himself does not seem to grant that superlative status to Land himself. Land’s historiography of Baptist development, borrowed from Ahlstrom, Baker, and Lumpkin focuses on generalities about bits of Calvinism and bits of Arminianism that only serve to cloud the reality of what Daniel Marshall, John Leland, Richard Furman, Silas and Jesse Mercer, and Basil Manly, Sr., were really doing. He seems to accept uncritically that his late 50’s early 60’s experience of Southern Baptist programmatic church life was “Sandy Creek” (50f). This representation would make Shubal Stearns, Daniel Marshall, Isaac Backus sad for they looked to George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards both for their revivalistic evangelism as well as their Calvinistic theology.

The concept of “congruent election” is a bit awkward. Congruency is a word that focuses on the achievement of harmony from a multiplicity of factors some of which may appear to be in tension. Every theologian seeks a view of election that is congruent with all the data that impinge on the doctrine. Just calling a view “congruent election” does not say anything about what it is. A Calvinist believes that unconditional election involving a compatibilist understanding of human responsibility is congruent with all the relevant Scripture texts. An Arminian believes that election based on God’s knowledge of the various responses of every

individual is congruent with all the relevant Scripture texts. Land's analysis of the Calvinistic view of election on page 54 is truly bizarre, matched only by his understanding of Romans 9–11, inspired by H. A. Ironside, that the entire discussion concerns only earthly privilege.

But as Land tries to explain election from his standpoint, even deeper difficulties develop. He wants to move beyond Arminian foreknowledge and reject Calvinist decrees and put God's knowledge of the creature as a personal experience that God now-and-eternally has with him, the creature. This involves some problems with the finiteness of the created order, the true temporality of created things and our experience, and the biblical presentation of linear history. Land's version of the Eternal Now and the participation of the creature in it contradicts the biblical notion of creation by making it co-existent with God Himself. God elects those He experiences as responding in faith, "based upon God's eternal experience *with*, not just prior knowledge *of*, individual beings." Congruent election turns out to be another form of conditional election, founded upon eternally existent human action not divine action. But we must not question this too far lest we question God Himself, for Land believes that "God led me to this understanding of election" (59). So I will forego any more criticism.

David Allen's article on the atonement has some helpful aspects to it. He defines terms fairly and clearly. Substitutionary atonement is in mind in each case and the spectrum from undiminished universalism to a highly discreet particularism with several nuances and combinations in between is covered. Allen argues for the position that God has equal desire for the salvation of every individual and has thus made provision in the atonement equally for every individual. The sins of every individual from Adam to the end of the age were "substituted for, atoned for, or imputed to Christ on the cross" (63).

Allen recognizes that Calvinists differ among themselves in how they frame their understanding of the atonement as it relates to the elect and the non-elect and he gives some helpful historical information on those issues (70–77), though there are mistakes [see Ben Rogers's articles on John Bunyan in this issue of the *Founders Journal*, and my remarks on Calvin just below]. He is wrong, however, in saying that Calvinists have not recognized that these differences exist among themselves (68). His views of Edwards need a bit more nuancing for Edwards, even in the passages Allen quotes, had a more robust idea of the union of Christ with His elect than Allen allows (76, 77). Edwards' meaning is hardly mistakeable when he reasons, "Christ's love then brought his elect infinitely near to him in that great act and suffering wherein he especially stood for them, and was substituted in their stead: and his love and pity fixed the idea of them in his mind, as if he had really been they; and fixed their calamity in his mind, as though it really was his" [Edwards, *Works*, 2:575, "Of Satisfaction for Sin"]. Allen also points to the elements of Robert Dabney's discussion of the atonement that give latitude to the



universalist language of Scripture. Even with all the apparent concessions made by Dabney, he clearly denies the semi-Pelagian, Arminian, Wesleyan, and Amyrauldian views of the atonement and affirms the “Calvinistic Theory” [Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 518–520]. Dabney argues from the doctrine of unconditional election, the Covenant of Grace, and immutability of God’s purposes in defense of several propositions. Those propositions may be summarized in the couplet of contrast: “If God ever intended to save any soul in Christ..., that soul will certainly be saved.... Hence, all whom God ever intended to save in Christ will be saved. But some souls will never be saved; therefore some souls God never intended to be saved by Christ’s atonement.” [Dabney, *Systematic Theology*, 521]. Even when Dabney admits that the “difficulties which beset the subject are great,” he never comes close to a view that will please Allen.

Historically, two positions characterize Calvinist interpretations. Some say, the Owenic view in Allen’s nomenclature, that the atonement by its very nature is definite and precisely adapted for the salvation of the elect. Others say that in its nature it could potentially be applied to each and every person from Adam to the last man standing, but by covenantal intention, sovereign application, and High Priestly intercession its design is to save, and actually does save, only the elect. This difference, however, does nothing to establish Allen’s view of the atonement.

Exegetically, Allen denies that the words “world” and “all” can ever be construed to mean a limited set of people. “No linguistic, exegetical, or theological grounds exist for reducing the meaning of ‘world’ to ‘the elect.’” (80). This flattening of the meaning of those words simply is not the way that the Bible uses them. Without contention, Romans 3:23, at the close of Paul’s discussion of the universal impact of sin, means every person without exception. At the same time “the whole world” in 1 John 5:19 contextually taken does not include each and every individual for it specifically excludes those “born of God.” So Jesus distinguished the “world” from His people in His intercessory prayer in John 17:9, 14–16. Jesus’ use of “all” in John 12:32 [“will draw all men to me”] has reference to His crucifixion as embracing the non-Jewish peoples as well as the Jews when seen in the context of John 12:20–23. It is easy empirically to demonstrate that His death does not draw each and every individual but certainly does extend the manifestation of the “eternal covenant” (Hebrews 13:20) to all the peoples of the world. Paul’s argument in Romans 11:11–15 identifies “world” with “Gentiles” as opposed to Jews and could easily be applied to his “all men” and “all” in 1 Timothy 2:4, 6 as he asserted and defended the legitimacy of his mission to the Gentiles (7). The covenantal embracing of Gentiles, the world, scandalized the Jews who missed justification by failing to see that they, in conjunction with the world, were dependent on the operations of electing grace. (Romans 10:1–13). Paul’s application of Joel 2:32 “whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved” and his inclusion of the Gentiles in the “remnant whom the Lord shall call” upset the

religious equilibrium of Israel. The New Testament from beginning to end hovers over that concept expressive of the New Covenant, so an interpretation of “all” and “world” with that as background lacks no exegetical warrant.

Allen’s theological affirmation that Scripture does allow for double payment of sin (83) flies in the face of the finality of Christ’s sacrifice for sin. “But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God... For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.... I will put my law into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is there is no more offering for sin” (Hebrews 10:12–18). Anyone reading these words must admit that in some sense the Scripture teaches that there cannot be a double payment for sins. This reality makes it very surprising that Allen would quote John Davenant in support of his position in saying “Therefore no injustice is done to those persons who are punished by God after the ransom was accepted for the sins of the human race, because they offered nothing to God as a *satisfaction for their sins*, nor performed that condition, without the performance of which God willed not that this satisfactory price should benefit any individual” [italics mine] (84). This is disturbing. Offer “satisfaction” and “perform” the condition? What has Christ done if He has not done those very things? The sins for which Jesus has atoned are gone, done for, wiped away, forgiven accomplished once and for all, no more satisfaction for sins remains to be done. Surely the elect must, and will, repent and believe, but the gift of the Spirit endemic to the New Covenant has been secured by Christ, the Covenant Keeper. Now, if one considers that this reconciling work of Christ is so great, so complete and full (as Hebrews argues) that it includes the effectuality of all the means by which it will be bestowed through union with Christ by faith, he will immediately concede that nothing can impede the purpose of God in granting to the people for whom Christ sanctified himself by covenant all that Christ purchased. (John 17:17–19; Hebrews 10:29) “He who spared not his own son but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him freely give us all things.” Peter affirmed that the saved have “obtained like precious faith through the righteousness” of Jesus and accordingly that his divine power has given us “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:1, 3). In purchasing all the graces through His meritorious sacrifice He has indeed purchased the people themselves (Ephesians 1:14; Titus 2:14). The “all” for whom He was delivered up will receive “all” the things He died to obtain.

Another theological objection of Allen fits precisely in this context, for he says that the “double payment” argument “negates the principle of grace in the application of the atonement—nobody is *owed* the application.” (83) Apart from the fact that this same style of argument is used by liberals to reject penal substitution, one could with the utmost faithfulness to the Bible say that one person is *owed* the application, and that person is the Lord Jesus (Isaiah 53:10, 11). He “bought,”

gained for Himself, the church with His own blood and His purchase, His gain, cannot fail to be granted. Grace toward us was merited by Him. He gave Himself for a people and He shall surely be given them as His purchased possession.

Allen objects that the double payment argument “confuses a pecuniary (commercial) debt and penal satisfaction” (83). This is no confusion; it is an application of the very language and conceptual framework of Scripture. The “wages” of sin is death (Romans 6:23). You are “bought with a price” and thus are owned by God (1 Corinthians 6:20). Jesus came to give His life as a “ransom” for many (Mark 10:45). In whom we have “redemption,” but not redemption through silver and gold but with the “precious blood of Christ” (Ephesians 1:7; 1 Peter 1:18, 19). The church has been “purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28) and the Lamb is worthy, merits from God, that which He has purchased: “Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and hast redeemed [that is, bought, acquired as property] us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation” (that is the “world”; Revelation 5:9). When Jesus illustrated forgiveness to Simon the Pharisee, He began, “There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both.” In short, there is nothing unseemly or unbiblical about conceiving the forgiving work of Christ in terms of commercial justice. The Bible places all those images before us frequently and vividly. Moral justice is precise and satisfaction for sin is commensurate with the nature and respective aggravations of sin committed. Christ’s sufferings completely emptied the debt of punishment owed by the elect for all their sins of every kind. Otherwise it could not be “more tolerable” even in judgment for some than for others (Matthew 11:22, 24). Allen misperceives penal substitution and satisfaction as he admits no parallel to the *quid pro quo* of commercial transactions. He has missed the sweep of the biblical presentation of justice in its intricately gradated dimensions. If justice is anything, it is punishment commensurate with the crime. The commercial language of Scripture goes far beyond empty metaphor and serves as an instructive analogy. This section deserves more thought before one can pronounce it as *THE* scholarly argument against Calvinism.

Kevin Kennedy’s article is, in my opinion, the best in the book. He argues his thesis cogently, provides some compelling primary source material, and interprets the material forcefully. His evidence demonstrates that Calvin did believe that Christ’s death by its nature could potentially save all the sinners of the world. Calvin based the free offer on that precept as well as his doctrine of aggravated guilt for any person that would hear the gospel and refuse to appropriate Christ’s death as his salvation.

There is, however, a more involved and deeply coherent theological argument that Calvin employs in his discussion of the work of Christ that must be grasped

before one can adopt the conclusion that Calvin did not believe in effectual atonement. Olson's review that affirms Calvin's comments on 1 John 2:2 as "the one passage... that seems to affirm limited atonement" is a bit over the top and shows that he is unacquainted with some major arguments in the Calvinistic corpus. Olson's unwarranted remark is not Kennedy's fault. Calvin's first five sermons on Ephesians show conclusively that Calvin saw every benefit of election as made certain by God's viewing us in Christ, and specifically in Christ as having died for us. Since the "only begotten Son is given to us, how should not all the benefits which he has in himself be communicated to us with him and through him?" Calvin asked (20). In his prayer to close the first sermons, Calvin asks God to "show us that the heritage which has been purchased for us by the blood of his only Son is ready for us, and that we cannot miss it, seeing that we go to it with true and invincible constancy of faith" (21). We will never have an adequate grasp of the origin of salvation if we refuse to look to God's eternal counsels "by which he has chosen whom he pleased and left the remainder in their confusion and ruin." (23). Because of election, the Spirit enlightens the chosen and draws them to the faith of the gospel. "Faith depends upon God's election, or else we must make St. Paul a liar." (28) When God looks at us, however, He does not see goodness or faith or anything that would commend us to Him, but only the evil that is in us and is obnoxious to His wrath. Calvin asked rhetorically, "Did God, then, have an eye to us when he vouchsafed to love us?" Then he answered, "No! No! for then he would have utterly abhorred us. It is true that in regarding our miseries he had pity and compassion on us to relieve us, but that was because he had already loved us in our Lord Jesus Christ." He had before him the "pattern and mirror in which to see us, that is to say, he must have first looked on our Lord Jesus Christ before he could choose us and call us" [Calvin, *Sermons on Ephesians*, 33, on 1:3, 4]. We are His enemies and He is contrary to us and can only love us when He is "willing to cast his eye upon our Lord Jesus Christ and not look at us at all" [52; 1:7–10]. The reason for God's discrimination in election must be consigned only to His will, to His secret purpose, and Paul does so clearly lest the faithful "think that they had faith through their own impulse and free will. I told you earlier that faith is a fruit of election" [44; 1:4–6]. One may know his election, therefore, not from any specific knowledge of God's secret counsels, but from the fact of his faith in Christ. Calvin says it simply, "How do we know that God has elected us before the creation of the world? By believing in Jesus Christ" [47; 1:4–6]. Christ is the mirror in which God beholds us to love us and at the same time is the mirror into which we look to know God's favor toward us. If we have faith, we are adopted, and all because He elected us before the creation of the world. Christ is the party to whom "we must resort to be assured that God loves us and acknowledges us as his children, and consequently, that he had adopted us before we knew him and even before the world was created" [48; 1:4–6]. We continually focus on Christ,

for it is certain that God may reprobate whom He pleases and elect whom He pleases, and the only sure token of election is our continual turning to Christ, having His sufficiency engraved on our hearts. “For the gospel may well be preached to all men, even to the reprobate, but for all that, God does not extend to them this special grace of quickening them into life” by which He also extends the mercy of continual repentance “till we are made partakers of the glorious immortality which he has so dearly bought for us” [49; 1:4–6]. All of these gifts come to us because Christ “made himself our surety both in body and soul, and answered for us before God’s judgment to win absolution for us” [51; 1:7–10]. God cannot love us in ourselves but must hate us; in love, however, He predestinated us to adoption only because He is “willing to cast his eye upon our Lord Jesus Christ and not look at us at all.” His look at Christ shows that “our sins are done away by such payment and satisfaction.” God’s acceptance of this in Christ is thus the ground of God’s electing love of us. “Seeing then it is so,” Calvin goes on to say let us not falter in our groanings, but let us moderate our affections so that we are content that our redemption has been purchased for us in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ, and let us trust in him that he will accomplish for us *the same thing in us and our persons that he has accomplished for us in his own*” [italics mine; 78, 1:13, 14]. In that light, Calvin encourages believers to find assurance that Christ will indeed accomplish what He intended in His redemptive death. “In the same way, when he speaks of the redemption which was purchased for us, to show that if we feel the effect of it in ourselves, so that we are not in any doubt about the things Jesus Christ has done for us, we must not fear that he has suffered in vain. For surely his sufferings would be to no purpose at all towards us, if it did not reach us so that it might result in our profit, and that we might enjoy it. That, therefore, is what is purchased in the person of our Lord Jesus Christ” [79; 1:13, 14]. In that assured result he reiterated what he had earlier affirmed when he encouraged believers, abased in themselves, to be “so renewed in the image of God that it may shine perfectly in us, till we are made partakers of the glorious immortality which he has so dearly bought for us” [49; 1:4–6].

This same order of election proceeding on the basis of a covenanted atonement summarized Calvin’s view of the priestly work of Christ. Though in ourselves, our corruptions deserve God’s hatred, He finds in us remnants of His good creation, His own handiwork that He loves. To restore us, therefore, he must wipe away the enmity by an expiatory sacrifice fully sufficient for the purpose. “Therefore, by his love God the Father goes before and anticipates our reconciliation in Christ. Indeed, ‘because he first loved us’, he afterwards reconciles us to himself.” Until, however, Christ actually suffers and dies, there is in us the “unrighteousness that deserves God’s indignation.” Christ’s death constitutes, therefore, the justification of God’s love for us before the creation of the world [and it is only of the elect of whom this is true], and the removal of enmity subsequent to his death

[Romans 5:8–10]. The love that is premundane as well as post-propitiation “was established and grounded in Christ.”

Later Calvin addressed this same dynamic in asking, “How did God begin to embrace with his favor those whom he had loved before the creation of the world? Only in that he revealed his love when he was reconciled to us by Christ’s blood.” Christ’s work is a meritorious work and thus its effects cannot be denied Him by the Father. “By his obedience, however, Christ truly acquired and merited grace for us with his Father.... I take it to be commonplace that if Christ made satisfaction for our sins, if he paid the penalty owed by us, if he appeased God by his obedience—in short, if as a righteous man he suffered for unrighteous men—then he acquired salvation for us by his righteousness, which is tantamount to deserving.... If the effect of his shedding of blood is that our sins are not imputed to us, it follows that God’s judgment was satisfied by that price.” Calvin goes on then to assert the absurdity of Christ’s suffering unless it is to effect the salvation of those for whom He paid. “It was superfluous, even absurd, for Christ to be burdened with a curse, unless it was to acquire righteousness for others by paying what they owed.” Again Calvin presents the same idea but includes a larger view by including Christ’s death as a part of His entire work of merit, by whom those for whom He performed it must benefit since God cannot deny reward to those that have indeed kept all the demands of the Law. “For if righteousness consists in the observance of the law, who will deny that Christ merited favor for us, when, by taking that burden upon himself, he reconciled us to God as if we had kept the law?” [Calvin, *Institutes* 2:16:3–5; and 2:17:1–6].

The reasons that many think Calvin believed in “limited” atonement are abundant and not unclear. God, to summarize Calvin’s progressive argument, loves us because He sees us through Christ’s covenantal sacrifice; He elects us in that context only; He forgives us [certainly] because of the redeeming death of Christ, a death that is precisely meritorious as culminating the obedience of Christ and must be rewarded with a gift to those for whom He has served as substitute; He sends His Spirit as a seal to keep us until the final manifestation of the redemptive purchase when all that have faith [given because of election, because of love, because of viewing us in Christ’s sacrifice] enter eternity for the unending display of his glory. The affirmations of universal provision in other passages should be filtered through this discussion and seen in light of the strong compatibilism of Calvin’s perceptions [See his comments on Acts 13:27]. Calvin even ends his most rigorous discussion on unconditional particular election with the prayer, “Also that it may please him to grant this grace not only to us, but also to all people and nations.” [Ephesians, 49]

Malcom Yarnell’s chapter narrating his fears of the negative impact of Calvinist theology empties a barrel of red herrings into the discussion. Calvin—guilty of “reckless speculation regarding the ordering of the divine decrees?” Hardly—Cal-

vin avoided speculation carefully and warned against it strongly. “Elitism” (223)? Really! Among frontier Baptist Calvinists that hoed in the day and preached at night. Religious intolerance (221)? Baptist Calvinists Roger Williams, Jon Clarke, Isaac Backus, John Gano, John Leland, Daniel Marshall, and Oliver Hart, champions of liberty of conscience did not know of the danger of their Calvinism making them religiously intolerant. Whatever dangers the Augustinian/Calvinist view of the universal church had for those men (220f), those dangers are completely inconsequential for Baptists. Yarnell’s warnings have virtually no historical pedigree in Baptist life, with the result that his concerns are so remote from reality that one is puzzled as to how such a chapter is even relevant to the present discussion. He embraces fully, and wrongly, Richard Muller’s discussion of what it means to be “Reformed,” and concludes, “In the end, it is impossible to be at once both truly Reformed and truly Baptist, especially when the local church is considered” (232). If Yarnell is serious, he must either be indifferent toward or negative in his evaluation of (for certainly he is aware of), the massive amount of Baptist argumentation from the seventeenth century to the present concerning the principles of continuity and discontinuity between the covenants. They saw themselves as strapped fast to a confessionally Reformed viewpoint but with a more consistent application of the provisions of the new covenant for marking out the people of God.

Jeremy Evans argues for agent causation within a framework of libertarian freedom. Evans posits an “I” that, correctly, has personal responsibility for all actions, but, unbiblically, he limits all prior causes to the choices of the “I” (263). To maintain personal responsibility he sacrifices causative connection with any prior circumstances and thus creates an un-predisposed moral agent apparently un-connected with Adam (certainly unaffected by a moral nexus derived from Adam), un-corrupted in affections, existing in a pristinely neutral stance concerning all things (263). Surely this must present problems to Evans in his ability to conceive of a God immutably holy and yet worthy of praise. His position demands the question, “If God can do no other than not sin, how can his sinlessness be praised?” This certainly seems to be the case when he contends (266f) that God’s self-sufficiency is undermined if He acts either in creation or providence in accordance with an internal propensity. He wants God, in this case, actually making a choice, just like us in his viewpoint, unconnected with the disposition of character. He would seem to cherish an idea that God might truly act contra-causally. The difficulties with “contra-causal” anything, including human choice, are so massive as to render even rational argument with the intent to convince about the subject irrelevant.

This issue of freedom in relation to moral cause is at the bottom of Bruce Little’s discussion of “Evil and God’s Sovereignty.” He establishes excellent guidelines for procedure in this discussion (277). Using John Piper and eventually Gordon Clarke as his major foils, Little engages in an extended critique of the

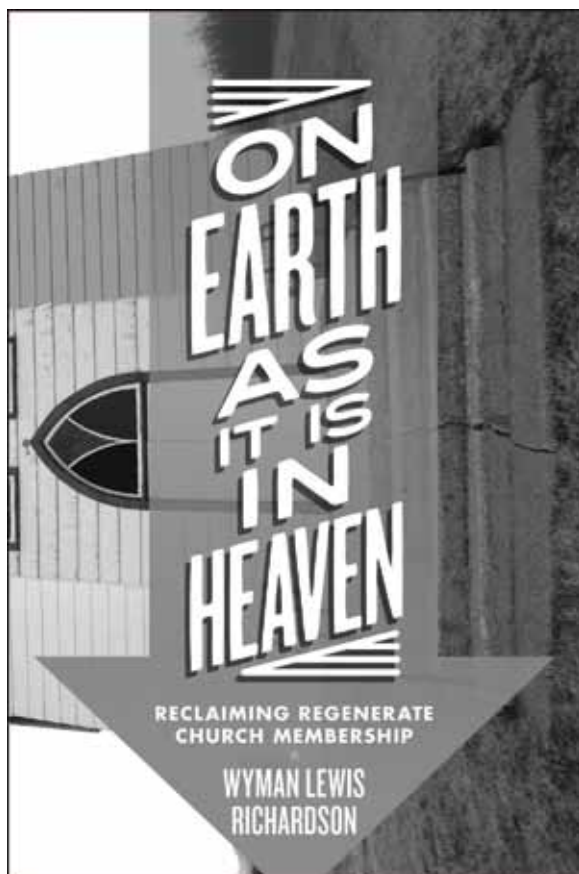
Calvinist view of divine purpose in all things—creation, providence, and redemption—with the recurring refrain that if this is so then finally God must be the perpetrator of evil; He alone is responsible as the original cause of all things, and, if so, must be blameworthy (294). Little employs an impressive list of atrocities to reinforce his major contention that these things cannot be seen as purposed by God. He wants the reader to adopt the idea that millions of sorrowful things occur without purpose (282f). God will finally demonstrate His glory in the eschaton but the virtually infinite number of events that are interpenetrated with evil are not designed by God for such a display (290f). While he admits that the majority of the world does not “love God” he sees this as no justification for any punitive measures that God might inflict at any time (283). Apparently he believes that the atonement has rendered this present order morally acceptable to God making any display of wrath in it a contradiction to God’s pledge (280). He does not accept Ephesians 1:11 as relevant to God’s control of all things but sees it as teaching a more generalized reactionary providence (292). He takes the “all things” as a dative, whereas it is accusative—i.e. not “works with all things,” but positively and actively “works all things according to the counsel of his will.” His view of divine commands is that these commands should be binding on God also (279f), not as requirements natural to the creator/creature distinction.

Little does not think it is possible for creatures to mourn the loss of temporal or eternal blessedness for fellow creatures, and resist the lawless imposition of one creature’s will on another creature, and at the same time consent with joyful resignation to the divine will in those same events. In Little’s world, we cannot view both natural and personal evil (Luke 13:3, 5) as reminders of divine wrath for a world walking in darkness and under condemnation (John 3:19, 20, 36), or as designed for chastening, purifying, and sanctifying for the believers (Hebrews 12:3–13; 1 Peter 1:6–9). We cannot blame the Romans and the Jewish religious establishment for crucifying Christ and at the same time thank God for bringing to culmination an eternal redemptive purpose. We cannot say with Joseph, “You intended it for evil but God intended it for good.” We cannot approve and join with David’s repentance in Psalm 53 and also approve the divine wisdom as ordaining this for the perpetuation of the genealogy of the Messiah through Solomon. Little would forbid us to affirm that the manifestation of the glory of the triune God in creation and redemption is a fair exchange for the fall of Adam and all its other consequences even though Paul sets this forth in Ephesians 3:7–21. The only way out for Little seems to be open theism.

Though they have resisted this, the writers should accept the judgment that they defend a classically Arminian, or openness, position. They should be worried, however, if Roger Olson is right that this is “*the* scholarly argument against Calvinism by evangelical authors.” ☹️



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